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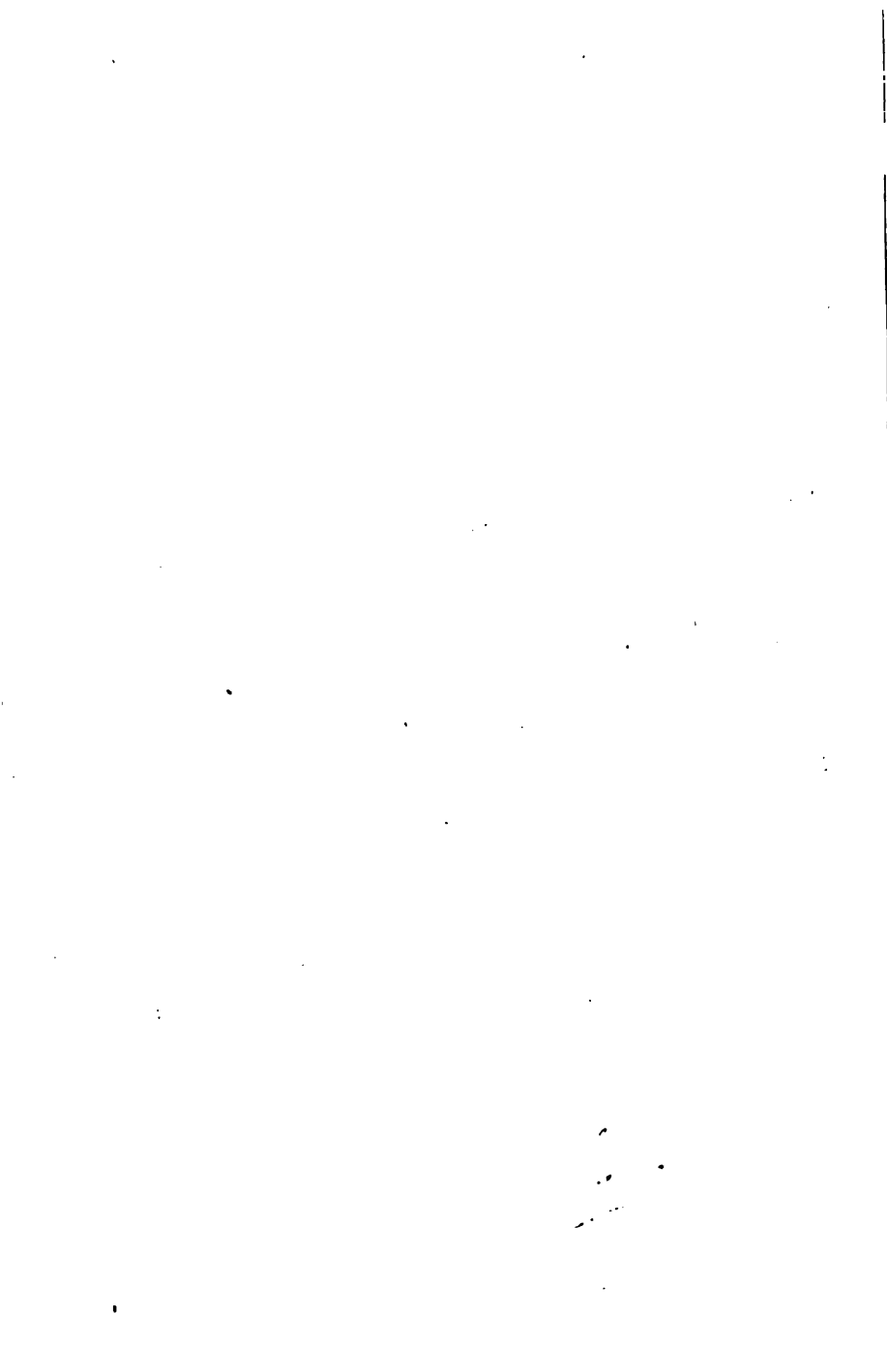




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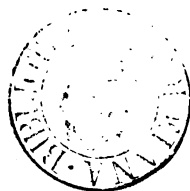


# GARDENHURST

A *Novel*.

BY

ANNA C. STEELE.



*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



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## DEDICATION.

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TO MY SISTER KATIE

(MRS. O'SHEA).

" A staff to stay, a star to guide ;  
A spell to soothe, a power to raise ;  
A faith by fortune firmly tried ;  
A judgment resolute to preside  
O'er days at strife with days."

OWEN MEREDITH.



# GARDENHURST.

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## CHAPTER I.

“The wafted scent of some old garden’s flower  
Blooming in silence round neglected bower.”

H. WHITMORE.

“And round about he taught sweet flowers to grow :  
The rose engroined in pure scarlet dye,  
The lily fresh and violet below,  
The marigold and cheerful rosemary,  
The Spartan myrtle whence sweet gum doe flow,  
The purple hyacinth and fresh costmary,  
And saffron sought for in cicalion soil,  
And laurel, the ornament of Phœbus’ toil.”

SPENSER.

GARDENHURST, formerly called “The Hurst,” once belonged to an old X——shire family of the name of Chesham, whose ancestors had lived in X—— as far back as X——shire could be remembered.

Up to the time of Charles I. the Cheshams

had been powerful neighbours for "weal or woe," but since that period they had been gradually descending in the scale of county grandeur, and now, A.D. 18—, they occupied a small red house called The Holme, situated a few miles from their ancient possession of Gardenhurst.

The latter estate had been gambled away in one night by a young heir of the Cheshams, who, living in the dissolute reign of Charles II., followed the common practices of the youth of that day, most of whom contrived to transmit their estates to their successors in a hopeless state of mortgage, when, indeed, there was any left to transmit.

There is a portrait of this boy, Gilbert Chesham, hanging up in the drawing-room of the Holme. He was only ten years old when Lely depicted his round, guileless face, and his little hand thrust firmly into that of his mother, a stately, mild-eyed lady, clothed in the usual draperies of white satin and point lace. Who, in looking at the fearless

blue eyes, and the smooth forehead shaded by a profusion of shining curls that tumble over the lace collar and red doublet, could imagine that twelve years afterwards this angel-faced boy would shoot himself through the head in a gaming-house, filled by a wild passion of fury and dismay because he had thrown his last stake and most ancient possession, Gardenhurst—and had lost it ?

His mother was sitting in her window recess one dusky summer evening when she heard the clattering hoofs of a horse gallop up to her door. Her dim eyes peered anxiously through the gloom, for her quick maternal instinct divined that some news of her son might be conveyed by this messenger from London ; and when her feeble hands tremblingly broke the cover of the packet that had been sent to her, the first thing her finger touched was a clammy silken curl, which some friend of Gilbert's had hastily severed from the fallen head when it was carried away, hanging heavily

over the arm that supported it, with a thick red drop oozing slowly from the forehead.

It was said that in the first ravings of her misery the unhappy woman flung up her arms like one "pierced by a great wound," and prayed that a curse might fall on the new possessor of Gardenhurst, and on all who might hereafter inherit a domain so won by "fraud and blood."

There was a suspicion of foul play attached to the transaction which seemed to justify these passionate words of Gilbert's mother, and a vague remembrance of her curse has come down to the present day, when the country people say, "Gardenhurst always has brought ill luck to its owners, and always will."

Certainly the prophecy has been in a great measure fulfilled by the ruin of each of its successive proprietors; a fate, however, which perhaps may be ascribed more to the unprofitable nature of the soil than to any ghostly influence exercised

by the shadow of the poor grief-stricken mother.

Gardenhurst passed through various hands, and at last, in the year 184—, was purchased by an eminent florist of the name of Ford, who spent all his fortune in cultivating and embellishing to an extraordinary degree that which had become little better than waste land.

Thistles were plucked up to make way for roses of rare beauty ; paths were traced through wildernesses of wild shrubs and brambles ; smooth velvety lawns succeeded the rugged patches of dandelions that had sprung up round the walls of the old house : and the whole of the once desolate region was converted into a garden such as one dreams of after reading the “ Arabian Nights.”

It cost Mr. Ford many thousands of pounds, this passion for varied hue and perfume.

He brought flowers from every part of the

world to this his great altar to Flora; he imported rhododendrons from India, azaleas from America, tulips from Belgium, peonies from Persia, and slips and cuttings of every description from all the best nursery grounds in England.

He passed a few happy years flitting among his flower-beds, as radiant as the butterflies that lived on their fragrance, drinking in breaths of perfume-laden air, and feasting his eyes on the various tints developed anew every month by the different species of flowers.

At last ruin came; and late one night Mr. Ford departed from his home as quietly and stealthily as a burglar might have wished to enter it.

He unclasped the garden gate, and looked up at the windows of his sleeping household, on which the moonbeams shed their pale light, breathed for the last time the scent of the wax-like magnolias, reared with tender care against his library window, and

brushed hastily by his China roses, whose heads hung heavy with night dew; and then—the garden gate fell forward on its latch, the sound of his footsteps soon died away down the silent road, and the curses of angry creditors, and the beauty of his floral collection, were the only records left of Mr. Ford's residence at Gardenhurst.

And now for three years silence and desolation again reigned over the place.

The gravel walks became as patched and irregular as ever, and the lawns swarmed with buttercups and daisies. The swans found ample provision in the green weeds which soon overspread the wide sheet of water that had once been graced by a fairy yacht and small rowing boats.

The last of these lay in rotten fragments in the rushes by the side of the lake, its once bright colours faded to a dirty red.

The broad boundary paths were soon narrowed by the closing over of the untrimmed luxuriant foliage that grew by their sides,

and after awhile the space between presented little more than a dim vista through which a few red roses peered here and there, as though striving to assert their former glory and supremacy in the place.

Within three years of Gardenhurst being dismantled, a rumour went through the county that the place had been taken by a gentleman from London, a Colonel Lisle, who would shortly bring down his wife and family to inhabit a small house close to Gardenhurst, which would serve as a temporary residence until the larger mansion could be rendered habitable and comfortable.

It was one bright morning in the month of August when this rumour was confirmed by two flies from the station drawing up before the "White Lodge," as it was called, and great was the excitement of the Misses Millwards, two old ladies who lived in an opposite house, when they heard the sound of the wheels rattling past their door.

Miss Eliza, the eldest, who was sitting by her window, peering anxiously down the road in search of any stray carts, little girls, or old women, who might excite her interest, was the first to perceive the carriages. "Virginia!" she said, in a tone of intense excitement, "They are come!"

Miss Virginia dropped her knitting pins and hobbled to the window, assisted by her gold-headed cane.

"So they are!" she said, in a tone of corresponding interest; "and look—look, they've got a parrot in a cage, and they are going to get out."

The two withered faces remained pressed against the window-pane, watching anxiously for the first appearance of the occupants of the carriages. The fly-door opened, and out stepped, with great deliberation, a middle-aged gentleman with a snowy head of hair, and an important-looking expanse of shirt front. This was Colonel Lisle. He was offering his arm with dignity to a grey-

eyed, black-haired lady, who was the next to descend; but she, being apparently of an impetuous disposition, jumped hastily out, saying, "Get away, *do*, James, I am nearly suffocated!" Then out swarmed the other members of the family, two curly-headed schoolboys, who were no sooner free from the trammels of the wraps under which they had been buried for some hours, than they set up a wild whoop of delight and dashed round the house, being, like all new settlers, anxious for exploration.

Then came up the next carriage, from the window of which peeped out two restless bright eyes, surmounted by a pair of sharp-cut ears—these appertained to Toby, the Scotch terrier—who was in an agony of agitation until he should feel his paws again resting on mother earth. Holding him in her arms was a little girl of about eight years old—a round-faced, blue-eyed creature, whose thick, silky curls tumbled down in soft profusion round the dark fur

boa that was twisted round her neck ; her dimpled fingers were half buried in Toby's shaggy coat, in a vain effort to restrain his transports. This was Christine Lisle, the youngest and fairest of the party. Close to her sat another child about four years older than Christine : this was Esther, or, as she was commonly called, " Esty ;" then came Flora, the eldest sister. These and the old nurse, Dolly, formed the complement of the Lisle party.

The Misses Millward had an excellent view of the new comers as the flies rolled away from the door of the White Lodge. Christine stood in the foreground pensively sucking her thumb, with a battered-faced doll hanging over one arm. Colonel and Mrs. Lisle disappeared within the door, while Esty ran away after the boys, followed by Toby, the latter making occasional digressions in search of imaginary cats or rabbits.

Miss Eliza sighed as the door closed on

their new neighbours, and she and her sister applied themselves to their little dinner with an additional zest, as they talked over the probable future doings of the new comers. Meanwhile, the latter were discussing a sort of picnic repast they had brought with them, as their servants and luggage were not expected till a later train. After they had finished their meal Colonel Lisle looked at his watch.

“We might as well go up to Gardenhurst,” he said, and the children and Mrs. Lisle gladly assented. Esty and the boys forthwith commenced a race down the long straggling path which led to what was to be their new home. The elders followed more slowly, Mrs. Lisle leading Christine, while the colonel and Flora gazed with dismay at the unkempt and overgrown condition of the flowers and brambles that strayed over the pathway. A quarter of an hour’s walking brought them up to the front door—and red, gaunt, old-

fashioned, many-gabled Gardenhurst was before them.

Mrs. Lisle stood still, feeling all her thoughts soothed to calm by the beauty of the scene before her.

It was, as I have said, on the afternoon of an autumn day when the sound of voices and patter of children's feet came to break the silence and solitude of the old home of the Cheshams. The magnolias gleamed white amidst their dark green foliage on the house, while from under the roof hung down the graceful tendrils of the vine-like Wistaria. The delicate lilac petals had already begun to droop, and the window-ledge was covered with their light withered blossoms. Running up one corner of the house were the light green leaves and quaintly-twisted flowers of the aristolochio-sipho, while the other angle of the wall was completely hidden by thick branches of ivy, in the dense leaves of which an occasional rustle gave token of feathered life. A

world to this his great altar to Flora ; he imported rhododendrons from India, azaleas from America, tulips from Belgium, peonies from Persia, and slips and cuttings of every description from all the best nursery grounds in England.

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“What are yah dooing there?” she said, in the choicest X—shire dialect.

“Open the door! open the door!” cried the colonel, angrily.

“I shayn’t,” was the prompt reply. “I don’t know knowthin about yah,” and with that she disappeared in the shadows of the interior.

“What an old catamaran! We had better go up to the lodge again,” said the colonel, discontentedly.

But youth, rich in expedients, and unbaffled by defeat, came to the rescue, and Gerald, their eldest boy, who had just run up flushed and panting to the scene of action, suggested that if they went round to the back-door they could effect a lodgement that way, as he had seen a little girl feeding some chickens there.

To the back door they accordingly went; and while the hens fluttered away with loud clucks of alarm, Colonel Lisle explained to the obtuse old woman that he

was the gentleman who had taken the house; and after he had aided her comprehension by the gratuity of a shilling, she became profuse in her curtsies and apologies.

Meanwhile the younger ones had effected their entrance, and were scampering in different directions all over the house.

Mrs. Lisle followed them more soberly; and, threading her way through a dark and low-built passage, found herself in the entrance to the front hall. An opposite door led to the drawing-room, on the threshold of which she paused, a little chilled and depressed by its utterly desolate appearance. Shreds of paper and plaster hung down from the walls, and the rats had made big holes in the weakest part of the wainscot and flooring. Filling up one side of the wall was a large and dingy oil painting, representing the murder of the Dominican Friars, a copy of the picture at Bologna. Perhaps in the light of morning Mrs. Lisle would have smiled at the

grotesque attitude of the flying monks, but seen dimly through the fast gathering dusk of evening, their white flowing garments presented a somewhat weird appearance.

The wind was beginning to rise with the decline of day, and a Virginia creeper that trailed down the wall outside the window beat restlessly against the broken panes of glass. Mrs. Lisle shivered, and felt relieved when she heard the patter of the children's feet, and the sound of their merry voices close behind her.

"Oh, mamma!" they exclaimed, almost simultaneously, "isn't it jolly?"

At that moment the colonel appeared at the door. Majestically poising his gold-headed cane in his hand, he looked round the room with a blank expression of dismay.

"Good Gawd!" he said, and there he paused, seemingly too much overcome by indignation and astonishment to say a word more. Flora was more practical.

"Come away, mamma! come away, children! you'll all catch your deaths of cold. Let's get back to tea. We can finish our investigation to-morrow morning."

"We ain't children no more than you!" retorted Gerald, with dignity. Flora was sixteen, Gerald thirteen and a half. The young discoverer had his ear pressed down against a plank of the floor, striving to ascertain the movements of a rat, which had scudded away to its nest under the flooring from the moment of Toby's excited entrance into the room.

Mrs. Lisle cut short the impending discussion by moving to go, and, taking the colonel's arm, she left the room, followed eventually by her whole tribe, only Toby venturing to resist the general mandate, and he remained as it were in a mesmerised attitude for some seconds, his eyes fixed on, and his nose fixed in, the hole in the flooring, and then, seized by a sudden panic as it flashed on him that he was left alone, he

rushed through the rooms, and, following the trail, dashed frantically down the long path in pursuit of his friends. Having once regained them, he expressed his delight by making wild gyrations round their feet, and then subsided into that pre-occupied expression common to the canine face.

When the party arrived at the White Lodge, they found a bright fire blazing, a kettle singing on it, and tea set ready for them, while a huge currant cake which occupied the centre of the table caused the faces of the boys to expand into a grin.

The servants, consisting of two women and a man, who had arrived an hour since, had made these preparations; but the cake was a delicate attention on the part of the Misses Millward:—they hoped that if they could supply Mrs. Lisle with anything she wanted that she would not hesitate to apply to them. They would do themselves the honour of calling on Mrs. Lisle on the following day.

"What kind old ladies!" said Mrs. Lisle, gratefully.

"Reg'lar stunners, I call them," agreed Egbert, the youngest boy, stuffing a piece of the welcome gift into his mouth, while Christine gazed at him sadly out of her round, blue eyes, wishing she were big and determined enough to make such a ready and successful raid on the coveted food before her.

"Where's Miss Esty? what have you done with Miss Esty?" said Dolly, the nurse, who, in the cleansing process through which she had put the children, had missed one little face, which it was her duty to make shine—one little head she was bound to scarify with the hardest of brushes and most determined of hands.

"Here I am," said a small voice, rather guiltily; and Miss Esty appeared, her naturally blooming complexion obscured by smudges of dust and dirt, her fingers even more completely begrimed, while her

blue pelisse, kept sacred for travelling and other great occasions, had two dismal-looking rents torn down the very middle of the skirt.

“O Lord ! O Lord !” cried Dolly, wringing her hands. “What a naughty child you are ! I’ll tell your mar, directly, I will !”

Mrs. Lisle, however, had left the room, and was absent for some minutes ; and by the time she had re-appeared, Esty had persuaded the irate Dolly, partly by real and partly by counterfeit penitence, to forego her intention of complaining to mamma.

Mamma had a practical mode, sometimes, of expressing her displeasure, which, although doubtless salutary in its effect, was decidedly painful. This consisted of a sharp box on the ear, delivered with a precision and force which used to make the reeling culprit feel as though all the tinder-boxes in creation were striking sparks before his or her eyes. No wonder, then,

that Esty crept away from the sitting-room as quietly as she could, and bore with more than ordinary patience the dabs of yellow soap being ruthlessly thrust into her eyes, nose, and ears, and the unmerciful castigation of the hair-brush, administered by Dolly with unusual energy as a sort of private let-out of temper, and compensation for the sacrifice she had made in not telling of Esty's misdemeanour. When the young lady came down to tea, she accounted for her late appearance by saying that she had been delayed at Gardenhurst by the sight of a large old box of worm-eaten books, which she had seen in one of the attics, and that she had stayed to look at the pictures in one of them. She did not add that, in endeavouring to reach her short arm down to the bottom of the box, she had lost her balance and fallen in headlong, coming out with her head and face in the manner described, and with one of the aforesaid books in her hand.

However, there must have been something suspicious in her uneasy mode of sitting on her chair; for when the meal was half finished, Gerald, the detective, espied the corner of something hard and square peeping out from under the hem of her pinafore.

"Oh, Esty, you greedy pig!" he cried; "you've got a book there; let me see it."

"*You're not to*, Gerald!" screamed Esty, in impotent wrath: "it's *my* book. Mamma, tell him to leave it alone!"

"What is it?" demanded the colonel, aroused from his contemplation of his hot buttered toast.

The book was handed to him, and, flushed and silent, the combatants awaited his decision. The colonel read the title-page, and his blue eyes grew large.

"Good Gawd, Elinor!" he said to his wife; "do you know what book it is your daughter has got hold of?"

He emphasised the *your* as though dis-

claiming any partnership with his wife in such a graceless offspring.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said his wife, impatiently.

“It is the ‘History of Tom Jones!’” thundered the colonel; and then he said, in milder accents, “Where do you expect that child will go to?”

## CHAPTER II.

"Once was her face bright as the morning sun :  
A man could then have loved her for Love's sake,  
Nor asked for dowry to enhance the worth  
His heart esteemed her at ; but now, whene'er  
Her withered hand is kissed, 'tis for the sake  
Of that it holds."

A. C. STEELE.

THE lights were out, the children had gone to bed, Colonel Lisle's last grumble was heard faintly through the passages, as he retreated to the little bed-room, made as comfortable as possible by the unwearied Dolly ; and Mrs. Lisle still sat with her feet on the fender, in the sitting-room below, her head resting on her hand, and her fine grey eyes staring blankly at the fast dying embers. Outside the silence was broken by the constant barking of a dog, and this sound, as well as that of the

clematis branches beating against the window, came strangely to the ears of the new comer.

Now that the sounds of active life which surrounded the lady all hours of the day were hushed, and there was no further cause for energy, Mrs. Lisle's heart felt heavy and dead within her.

"Always the same," she thought to herself—"always the same; toil and trouble, irritation that seems irrepressible, which must yet be repressed; labour without profit or pleasure; labour enough to keep the wolf from the door, but with no power to bring comfort or affluence; a grumbling husband, troublesome children, who will be ungrateful when they grow up. Ah, well!" she sighed, "as I've made my bed, so must I lie on it. I don't wish to complain." Here Mrs. Lisle got up and kicked away the footstool viciously that had supported her feet. "But I wonder why I was ever born?" with which unanswered question

on her lips, she too left the room and went to bed.

She was wearied by the long journey and fatigues of the day, by the incessant calls made on her attention, and the never-ceasing grumbling of her husband, which after a time became as irritating as the tiny feathered shafts of the Liliputians were to their giant enemy; besides, she was too tired out by the struggles of life to feel any of that exuberant delight which filled the hearts of the children as they entered the precincts of a new home.

To them Gardenhurst was an unpenetrated paradise—a paradise because unpenetrated; and their young, fresh, vivid imaginations pictured fabulous delights to be gleaned from the wilderness of woods, shrubberies, and fruit trees. Every overgrown walk contained for them a delicious mystery. Every bird that flew from the bushes, every species of autumn fruit that glowed amidst the red-brown leaves, would

prove to them a source of interest and enjoyment.

The boys had gone to sleep, with visions of Toby passing swiftly before their eyesight, in full pursuit of grey cock-tailed rabbits; while a beautiful smile played round Christine's mouth as she sleepily remembered a long row of strawberry beds, in which she had seen some of the dark-red berries of the Hautbois strawberry peeping out when she went down the path to Gardenhurst.

As for Esther, a different smile lurked round the corner of her mouth, as she tucked up her little feet under her like a dormouse preparing for his winter slumber.

I am compelled to say that her reflections were not of so innocent a complexion as those of her sister, for underneath that guilty head and downy pillow lay the dusty little volume which had caused Colonel Lisle to utter that forcible adjuration mentioned in the last chapter. "Tom Jones" had been laid on a high shelf in

the sitting-room after the stormy discussion had ended to which his ill-timed appearance had given rise; but Esty had never taken her eyes off the coveted prize, and when the children were saying "Good-night" in one end of the room, Esty quietly and deftly jumped on a chair, secured the book, and said "Good-night" as demurely as though it were still on the shelf to which Colonel Lisle's parental care had consigned it. And now she had got it safe under her cheek, and her fingers could feel the edges of the volume which contained so much temptation for her. The temptation consisted of a series of engravings, after designs by Gravelot, representing the loveliest and most slender of Sophias, with an impossibly small but very graceful head on her falling shoulders, looking tenderly reproachful at the equally small and delicate features of her unfaithful lover. Esty had caught a glimpse of these perfections in the dim light of the attic at

Gardenhurst, and, as she ran panting up the long path in pursuit of her relatives, she had perfectly revelled in the anticipation of the treat the morning's light would bring her.

"Come, dear, say your prayers!" Dolly had said ere she tucked up the feminine black sheep that night.

Esty obeyed, and, clasping her hands, went through the usual formula, concluding with a mechanical blessing for "Pa and ma, brothers and sisters;" then, turning on her side, she murmured :

"I *hate* Gerald; he's a beast!" and so she went off to sleep.

It is time for me to answer a question that may ere now have suggested itself to the reader, and which was, at the time I write of, whispered in every country house in X——shire——namely, "Who are these Lisles?—where do they come from?" Only one person in the county could have answered the question, and she lived so

secluded a life, was so impervious to the usual amenities of society, that it would have required a bolder spirit than any of the X—shire people possessed to have induced them to invade her privacy to seek to gratify their curiosity. This was the Countess Renshawe—an old lady who lived in a fine mansion, called Lynncourt, situated about six miles from Gardenhurst. This Lady Renshawe was, in fact, Colonel Lisle's own aunt, and she was the loadstone that had drawn this large family within her circle.

“Why couldn't they leave me in peace?” the old lady complained to herself when she received that letter from Colonel Lisle, informing her that he was coming to settle near her, as he found London air injurious for his young family, and London rates and taxes equally injurious to his pocket. “James, having spent all his youth and money away from me, comes, now that he is getting poor, old, and cantankerous, to

afflict me with his company and that of his children—nasty little savages!—who will go whooping all over the house.”

And the old lady sighed, and took a pinch of snuff impatiently.

Nevertheless, she sent a tolerably civil answer to her nephew's letter, only warning him that she believed Gardenhurst to be very damp and unhealthy, and that there was no skilful physician residing nearer to it than W—— (the county town), which was about thirty miles off, and she only “*hoped* that his poor children wouldn't suffer from the change.”

Having despatched this epistle, Lady Renshawe felt that she had done what she could, which was indeed but little, to arrest the blow about to fall on her; and all that now remained was to sit still and hope that some unforeseen accident might occur to prevent this invasion of her domestic peace.

Days went on, and, hearing nothing more

from her nephew, Lady Renshawe began to hope that he had altered his mind; and this thought gave such added brightness to her eyes and lightness to her step, that her old servants declared, proudly, "that missus grew younger every day."

## CHAPTER III.

"Where aged elms, in many a goodly row,  
Give yearly shelter to the constant crow,  
A mansion stands:—long since the pile was rais'd,  
Whose Gothic grandeur the rude hind amaz'd;  
For the rich ornament on ev'ry part  
Confess'd the founder's wealth and workman's art."

THE DOWAGER.

BEFORE Colonel Lisle turned himself round for his final nap on the evening of his arrival at Gardenhurst, he made a significant observation:

"We must call on the countess to-morrow."

And at breakfast-time the next day, when surrounded by the jabber of voices and bevy of young faces, after a careful adjustment of his cravat, Colonel Lisle looked up, and said "Elinor" to his wife.

"Flora, we must call on the countess to-day."

This announcement was received with a general groan.

"Oh, papa," said Flora, sadly, "we shall be so uncomfortable to-day if we don't get things a little ship-shape;" and she looked disconsolately at the rows of unpacked boxes, and the disordered aspect of tables, chairs, and mantelpiece, each of which was covered with odds and ends that as yet had found no local habitation.

"*I won't go!*" said Gerald, defiantly, and he was echoed by the others, imitative as young creatures mostly are, whether human or chimpanzee.

"*I won't go,*" repeated Christine, vaguely, stuffing her little mouth the while with a great spoonful of sop.

"Silence, children!" said the colonel. "If I may be permitted to have an opinion in my own house," he continued, majestically, "I should say that it would be ex-

ceedingly unwise to let the countess hear of our advent by means of a third person; and some of you had better go over to Lynncourt this afternoon, and announce our arrival."

"Go yourself, pa," audaciously suggested Gerald.

"I shall do no such thing. I have a good deal to do, and shall have my hands full all day;" and, to evade any further discussion of the subject, Colonel Lisle left the breakfast-table and betook himself to his cigar and the perusal of his newspaper.

"The fact is, gov., you funk the old lady!" Gerald cried after him as he left the room; and the colonel, hastening his steps, pretended not to hear the irreverent suggestion, which, perhaps, carried some truth along with it.

"I suppose somebody must go," said Mrs. Lisle. "Flora, we can't do without you here, and as for the boys, they are sure

to get into mischief—not but what Esty is as bad, if not worse.”

The perplexed mother looked sadly at the row of rebellious faces, and wondered which child was least calculated to tread upon (metaphorically speaking) the aristocratic toes of the countess.

“Esty must go,” she said at last, “and, Dolly, you can escort her, and take a note from me to Lady Renshawe.”

Esty looked up quickly, as though inclined to rebel at this decision, but a significant glance from Dolly silenced the rising expostulation. Esty thought of her little brown volume, and hung her head; ere another half hour was over, she and her nurse were walking quickly past dewy hedgerows and down sweet-scented lanes, accompanied by a country boy, who for the sum of sixpence was to conduct them by the short cut to Lynncourt. The gleams of the morning sun lit up the silvery films of the cobwebs that trembled on the

bramble, and the drops of night-dew that clung to the fern leaves. Every broken bit of earth, every glistening group of wild grasses, conveyed a sense of freedom and freshness to the little Londoner, who for two years past had breathed nothing but town fogs and smoke.

Esty was ecstatic. "Oh, Dolly," she cried, "isn't it lovely?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know, Miss," said Dolly, snappishly. "What *I* like are nice shops, with bonnets and caps in them, and a nice clean pavement to walk on. I'm afraid we shall find it very lonesome down here."

"Across the fields" it was only three miles and a half to Lynncourt, and after an hour's walking—a somewhat long hour, owing to the difficulty Dolly experienced in keeping her charge out of such mischief as wetting her shoes, or adding fresh insults to the injuries already sustained by the blue pelisse. Their guide informed

them that if they would stand on a knoll of meadow-land close to them, they could see "the house yonder." They did so, and there, about a quarter of a mile away, stood Lynncourt, the residence of the Countess Renshawe, a countess in her own right, the largest landowner in X——shire, and the aunt of Colonel Lisle.

There stood grand old Lynncourt, a vast red brick mansion, flanked by four towers that looked perfect emblems of feudal strength. The morning sun shone brightly down their massive sides, and rendered clearly the delicate greyish-blue tint which time had cast over the once bright-red bricks.

Wave after wave of thick foliage rose behind and around the house, the graceful masses of autumn trees being well disposed to throw out the bold character of the noble pile of buildings they enshrined; innumerable flocks of rooks gave out cheerful caw-caws as they passed to and fro in their

undisturbed leafy territory, and herds of deer crouched in the under shadows of the avenues, or passed with slow, halting steps in line down the more open glades.

“Oh, Dolly, what a great place it looks!” said Esty, in a subdued voice.

“I wonder what aunt will be like—if she’ll be nice or nasty?”

“Oh, she’ll be nice enough,” said Dolly, re-assuringly. “Come along, do!”

They arrived now at a massive gateway, where two stone griffins rested immovable on the columns by the side.

Dry leaves lay lightly between their paws, and the pleasant flicker of sunlight coming through the thick foliage overhead played over their grey stone backs, so that their ferocity seemed tempered by the beauty of the day. Nevertheless Dolly, looking up, ejaculated:

“Laws! what horrid-looking things!”

An old woman opened the gate for them, and the nurse and child found themselves

traversing a long avenue of elms and chestnut trees; thick brushwood and a rich undergrowth of fern formed a shelter for herds of red deer, whose antlers peeped up in all directions as soon as their quick ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps.

This avenue continued for about half a mile; and then Dolly and her charge, passing through a large iron gate to the open part of the park, found themselves about three hundred yards from the house.

A broad gravel path ran round this, and by the sides stood large vases filled with scarlet geraniums, while over their rims drooped long tendrils of blue and white convolvuli.

Standing close to a rose tree on the lawn they saw the figure of a lady, slightly bent in the back, and wearing a large poke bonnet, which concealed every feature of her face, excepting, indeed, the tip of her

nose, which projected like the proboscis of a Roman emperor on a medallion.

Esty turned white.

“Oh, Dolly, I do believe that’s aunt herself!”

“Lor, well! I shouldn’t wonder if it is.”

Dolly edged off from that side of the lawn where Lady Renshawe stood, and conducted Esty to the low, nail-studded door that formed the principal entrance to the house.

While they are waiting there, and Esty’s awe-stricken eyes are regarding the huge escutcheon above the porch, I will devote a few words to the owner of this noble domain.

Fifty years prior to the date at which my story begins, two young ladies—co-heiresses and daughters of the then Earl of Renshawe—lived together in sisterly amity and concord at Lynncourt.

These were the ladies Kerriston—Annabella and Clara—and they were the sole issue of the aforesaid earl.

They were of the respective ages of nineteen and seventeen years (Annabella being the elder), when accident made them acquainted with a young and handsome man, Captain Lisle, whose regiment was stationed at W——, the county town.

Chance commenced the acquaintance, but design continued it, for Captain Lisle soon became alive to the advantages to be reaped from his intimacy with two handsome women, well-born and rich, and before he had visited three months at Lynncourt, he discovered that he might have either of the sisters for the asking. They were very young. Their father had delayed their appearance in the great world because he feared that their beauty and wealth might make them too great attractions for the needy and unprincipled. And lo! while he was watching the enemy from afar, a foe had crept in through his gate under his very eyes, and the earl saw him not.

For a long time Frederic Lisle wavered to and fro in his allegiance to the two sisters, uncertain whether to be more attracted by the somewhat imperious beauty and masculine intellect of Annabella, or by the softer lineaments and ductile mind of her sister. He sang duets with and attended Annabella at the tea table, but he walked in the shrubbery with Clara, and talked sentiment with her under the flowering lilacs and drooping acacias; and at last one summer morning arrived when Lord Renshawe, hobbling round his woodland domain, stood still, transfixed by amazement and indignation: for there in the shady path before him, unconscious of his approach, stood two young people, whose attitude was eminently picturesque had my Lord Renshawe been disposed to view them in an artistic light.

The light dress of his daughter fluttered round her lithe figure, supported by Captain Lisle's arm; her fair head rested on his

shoulder while he laughingly tried to disengage from the tangles of those sunny curls a number of lilac petals that had fallen in a shower from the branch overhead.

“Why, what the dev——?” But the young couple, startled and terrified as they were, met the surprise bravely, and entreated and prayed so long and earnestly for forgiveness, that the father, always too indulgent to this his favourite child, at last was induced to give some sort of consent to their happiness, only stipulating that no immediate steps to ensure it were to be taken, as “Clara was very young, and might change her mind.”

And so Captain Lisle found himself engaged before he had intended it, and accident had solved the difficulty which the choice of beauties had presented to him; but his feelings that night were not enviable, when he felt conscious, by the keen scorn expressed in Annabella's fine dark eyes,

that she had heard of and fully appreciated the meanness of his conduct.

She never forgave him, and I do not think she ever, in her heart, quite forgave her sister ; although when Lord Renshawe's sudden death, which occurred a few months after, left the sisters alone in the world, Annabella did all that she possibly could to ensure Clara's future comfort and happiness.

She prepared the trousseau, took means to ensure the settlement of Clara's money, so that her husband could in no way touch it, presented the young couple with a superb service of plate to start with, and, finally, saw Clara given away at the altar to her lover, just one year after Lord Renshawe's death and her own discovery of Frederic Lisle's treachery.

The fief was a female one, so it was as Lady Renshawe that Annabella uttered these parting words to her sister :

“ Good-bye, dear ! I've done my duty to you—have I not ? ”

"Yes, ye—s," sobbed Clara, and she would have thrown herself on her sister's neck, but the latter put her back.

"I have only to say now that if you and your husband wish to requite any service I may have rendered you, you will do it best by letting me see and hear as little of you as possible. Good-bye!" and with a cold shake of the hand with her brother-in-law, who stood looking inexpressibly perplexed, Lady Renshawe parted for ever from the only near relative fate had left her.

"Thank Heaven, they're gone!" she said, bitterly, as she re-entered her sitting-room, and sat down to a lonely dinner.

But the loneliness, oppressive as it was, was less irksome to the young beauty of two and twenty than the gnawing feeling of jealousy that had never ceased to live in her heart since her sister's betrothal to the man she had hoped to accept as her own husband.

Guardians, trustees, and would-be chape-

rons had buzzed round the young countess ever since her orphanage; but like the vindictive ghost in the story of Wild Dayrell, she "scared them all." By her acuteness in business matters and thorough independence of character she soon proved that she could exist without their advice or assistance; and reluctantly, one by one, the would-be sharers in Lynncourt's greatness and Lynncourt's wealth were compelled to abandon both to the absolute control of the astute young lady.

"Of course she'll marry," said the X—— gossips; and "of course she'll marry," they went on repeating, long after the rounded cheeks of the countess had shrunk and faded, and the black hair had become streaked with grey.

Lady Renshawe never married; and she never saw Captain or Lady Clara Iisle again.

Years after, when both her sister and false lover had gone to their last rest, the

countess consented to receive their sole surviving child, her nephew James, then a fine young man of two and twenty (a lieutenant in the ——— Dragoons. He was handsome in person, and at that time was winning in manner; and, after he had got hopelessly in debt two or three times and had called on the countess's clear head and well-filled purse to aid him in his difficulties, she really became attached to him, finding herself interested in solving the problem of how to keep a good-natured, extravagant, ne'er-do-weel out of the way of mischief. Remember, she was not a mother herself, and therefore not likely to be troubled with any additional black sheep; otherwise, she perhaps would have looked less leniently on a colour that might have tainted the whole flock.

For two years her handsome young nephew was a source of never-failing interest and amusement to her. But at the end of that time, Lieutenant Lisle's pecuniary

embarrassments made it necessary for him to take up his residence on the Continent, and during a stay of two months at Florence he fell in love with a Miss Elinor Morley, the portionless daughter of a half-pay officer resident there, married her, and then wrote and asked his aunt for her consent to that which was irrevocable.

Lady Renshawe's answer was characteristic.

"My dear James," she wrote, "you have made a fool of yourself to please yourself; do not expect me to feel any reflected pleasure from your act of folly; do not trouble yourself to call on me if you come to England, as I am growing old, and the sight of fresh faces is irksome to me. I would recommend you to practise economy a little, now that you have entered on the expenses and responsibilities of married life. And I am your affectionate,

"A. KERRISTON RENSHAW."

James Lisle was twenty-four years of age

when he took unto himself a wife ; and it is but due both to himself and Miss Elinor Morley to say, that they bitterly repented the rash step they had taken before they had been married many years.

Not that they did not love each other : they were quite as much attached to one another as married people generally are, but they both got rather wearied of their lives—she, with the incapability of her husband to appreciate the greatness of the love she had at first lavished on him, and he, with the shackles of poverty that weighed upon him more heavily every year as his family increased and his means grew less.

Time passed away ; the rich brown of James Lisle's hair had changed into snowy white, and he and his wife were growing old together under trouble and privation, when the advertisement that Gardenhurst, X——shire, was to let caught his eye one morning as he sat over a smoky

little fire in his breakfast-room in A—Street, London.

James, now Colonel Lisle, had considerably aged since that sunny morning when he walked quickly up the Lung' Arno with the intention of asking Elinor Morley to accompany him to the English chapel to make herself one with him and his fortunes.

His brown curls had become white; the dimples round his mouth had hardened into deep lines, and the indentations on his broad forehead spoke of trouble and vexation; above all, a certain querulousness in his voice, and an impatience in that of his wife, showed that the days since their marriage had not flowed very smoothly with them: still they had their gleams of happiness—who has not?—poverty, although it nipped, could not repress Mrs. Lisle's love of art; and she found time, even amidst the drudgery of housekeeping, stocking-mending, and nurs-

ing, to taste many a pleasure unknown to women of meaner capabilities. During the weary years of her sojourn in London she found consolation for the toil and clamour of her household life, by spending quiet hours in the picture galleries on those days devoted to artists; and it was no slight pleasure to her to think, as she laid her weary head on her pillow each night, of the painting she had left smiling on her easel, and which would meet her freshened gaze the next morning with what would seem renewed radiance, while its very defects would give her as much pleasure to attempt to correct as a lover feels when he fancies he removes the mental blemishes of his mistress.

Meanwhile, Colonel Lisle also had his moments of solace in the shape of daily papers, town gossip, and an occasional dinner given him by some chance friend at "The Tatters."

But still, as his children grew bigger,

and their small house in A—— Street did not enlarge itself in proportion, and as the expenses of the boys' tuition made it more and more difficult to pay all the rates and taxes incidental to residence in a town-house, Colonel Lisle came to the conclusion that some steps must be taken to soften the heart and open the purse-strings of his noble relative, the Countess Renshawe.

“If the old girl and Elinor could only meet,” the colonel said, in the colloquial style of domestic conversation, “they’d get on like a house on fire!” And so, a few days after he had seen the advertisement, Colonel Lisle sat down to his desk, and penned a letter to his noble kinswoman, in which he informed her that the white cheeks and thin legs of his children warned him that a small cramped house in town was not the best residence in the world for a large family, and that he had been compelled to look out

for some country-house, where at a less expense he could ensure better accommodation for his "dear ones." A friend had pointed out to him an advertisement, announcing that "Gardenhurst" was to be let; and partly because he had many pleasant reminiscences associated with the dear old place (in his boyhood James Lisle had been in the habit of plundering the Gardenhurst fruit trees and fishing in the long pond there), and partly because he would like to spend his latter years near one whose kindness had so often smoothed away the troubles of youth, he had made up his mind to remove at once to Gardenhurst, and to reside in the lodge until he could make the large house a little habitable!"

"Well, that's a hint for me," said Lady Renshawe, as she paced up and down her gravel walk, with quick, little, irritable steps. "Wants me to go and make the place comfortable for that woman and her

brats;—a likely idea!” And my lady sniffed and walked with a more determined step than ever.

Meanwhile we have left little Esty and her nurse standing in the portico of the Lynncourt doorway. In answer to Dolly’s somewhat feeble ring, a tall and pompous-looking butler came to the door: he had what seemed to be a white frill of hair standing up truculently round his shining bald head, and he spoke in a strong aggressive voice, which made Esty feel meeker than ever.

“If you please, this is Lady Renshawe’s little niece, Miss Lisle, and she’s come to call on her aunt, if you please,” said Dolly.

“Ho! really!” said the dignified butler (his name was Mr. Lintoff), in a tone of contemptuous surprise. “Didn’t know she had one!”

“Well, you know it now,” said Dolly, sharply, her spirit rising under the op-

pression of patronage. "So please don't keep Miss Lisle waiting."

Mr. Lintoff smiled. This great man was magnanimous, and rather admired the retaliation his magnificence had provoked.

"Come hin, hif you please," he said, more graciously; and then, while Esty gazed subdued and awe-stricken at the folds of faded tapestry that hung on the staircase wall, and the dim shields and helmets that were fixed in grim array round the hall, Mr. Lintoff warned her in solemn accents: "Little miss, 'twould be best not to make too much noise walking over the floors; missis don't like no noise but her own!" He walked before them until they came to a glass-door overlooking the garden.

"There she is!" and Mr. Lintoff, opening the door for them, walked grandly back to the region whence he had come, declining to accompany them down the long walk to announce them; for, as he

said, the "sun halways made is ead hache."

Lady Renshaw was standing before her favourite red-rose trees, snipping off with a pair of huge scissors any withered bud that could be detected peering out among the glowing blossoms, when she was stopped in her decapitation of the roses by hearing a little voice at her elbow saying, "Good-morning, grand-aunt;" and then, like the Lady of Shalott, she knew that "the curse had come upon her," and, turning round sharply, the large scissors open in her hand presenting a somewhat menacing appearance, she said :

"Oh, you're come, are you? And who are you?"

"Esther Lisle, gran'-aunt; and I've come to bring you a letter, and to hope you're well; and oh, grand-aunt!" and here Esty's tone of respect changed to one of intense anxiety.

"Well, what's the matter, child?"

“Oh, don’t you see Toby’s running after a cat, and if he catches her he’ll kill her.” And here Esty’s terror for the safety of the cat quite overmastered the small amount of manners she had been assuming for the occasion, and she rushed away down the smooth-shaven lawn, at the bottom of which could be seen a view in perspective of Toby’s back, as that enthusiastic animal sat barking furiously, his tail beating the ground and his bright eyes and ears pointing upwards to the branch of a tree, where stood a large tabby cat, clawing her perch with tail unnaturally swollen and eyes flashing fire.

“Toby, Toby, To-o-o-by,” screamed Esty, but with no effect. Toby remained as immovable as the celebrated American colonel might have done when he stared down the ’coon; and Esty had to pick him up and carry him under her arms to the door-step of the house, where Lady Renshawe awaited her, speechless with indignation.

"How dare you bring that brute here?" she demanded. "Nasty little thing, it ought to be shot."

Esty flushed.

"It's quite natural Toby should run after the cat, but you ought to know better than to wish to have him killed."

"Hoity toity," said the old lady—"teaching your granny. No, never mind, nurse, you needn't apologise for her. Go round and get something to eat, and leave the child with me."

Dolly curtsied and retreated, casting a warning look at Esty.

"Now, child, come and talk to me a little." And she led Esty up to where garden seats were placed by the wall, and half poked, half thrust her down on one of them. Esty sat with her little legs hanging down, and a generally constrained expression on her face. The old lady placed her spectacles more firmly on her nose, and grimly surveyed the little victim.

"You're very plain, my dear," she remarked at last.

"Yes, grand-aunt," said Esty, meekly.

"And very stupid, too, I dare say," retorted her old relative.

"Yes, aunt."

"Well, you don't like me, do you?"

"No, not much," said Esty, candidly.

Lady Renshawe grinned, and there was a pause.

"Who do you think I'm like?" the latter asked presently.

"Well," said Esty, with a momentary flash of enthusiasm, "I was thinking that you are like the old witch in Jorinda and Jorindel—Gammer Grethel's story, you know."

"Upon my word you're a nice child. Come in and have some luncheon; I'd better stop your mouth before you say anything else rude," said Lady Renshawe, rising to go.

"Yes, aunt," responded Esty, meekly as before, and with some difficulty she wriggled

her legs to the ground, and followed her aunt through the glass-door into the house.

A pleasant room was that dainty little sitting-room into which Lady Renshawe ushered her young visitor ; muslin curtains waved at the open windows and clematis clambered over the window-ledge ; a table covered with books stood between the windows, and in the midst of these there was a blue china vase filled with red roses and lilies of the valley.

The dove-coloured walls were hung with rich prints and one or two valuable original pictures. Lady Renshawe's quick eyes saw the start and look of admiration in the child's earnest gaze as she looked at one of these.

This was a Magdalen by Guido—a three-quarter face, with eyes looking up and a burnished glory of auburn hair falling softly over the sweet mellow-tinted cheeks, and over the round fingers of the clasped hands.

“What do you think of that?” asked Lady Renshawe.

“Oh, aunt, I think it is beautiful—I wish——”

“What do you wish?”

“That mamma could copy it, she would like it so much.”

“Ho!” said Lady Renshawe, snappishly, “I dare say; go and take off your things, child!”

And she pointed to an adjoining ante-chamber, wherein the little pelisse and straw hat might be deposited; and when the child returned with a pair of blue eyes shining brightly through her unkempt brown tresses, the old lady drew her to the window, and after looking narrowly at the small face for some moments, inclined her wrinkled chin and imperious nose, and for the first time kissed the new comer.

“I don’t think I shall mind you much after all, my dear,” the old lady said, graciously; and she turned away with a softer

gleam in her grey eyes, and a tremulous movement agitating the wrinkles round her mouth. Some look, some chance expression in the child's face, had sent a thrill through Lady Renshawe's heart, reminding her of a summer-day of years past, when she sat with her little sister reading Faëry Tales under the old cedar outside, and when Clara, with eyes as blue as Esty's, had looked up inquiringly to learn the fate of those lost children who had trusted to bread-crumbs to guide their way, and who found that their landmarks had been devoured by the birds of the forest.

Lady Renshawe had not wept when she heard of her sister's death. The wife of Captain Lisle was a woman who had betrayed her confidence, and who had been her successful rival. Time and absence had confirmed rather than shaken off the bitter impressions left on Annabella's mind on that day when her sister and lover

went forth to cast their lot together, and for many years after the remembrance of Clara had only brought a pang of anger into her sister's heart. And now that it was all over, "the vain, unsatisfied longing," the love and the bitterness of disappointed passion—all merged in the dead calm of fifty years of monotonous life—Lady Renshawe looked into a child's eyes, and felt, for the first time, tenderness and remorse.

"I was hard," she muttered—"too hard. She had no mother, and I, who should have acted as one to her, was a jealous, implacable rival."

And little Esty marvelled, for some moments after, at the tenderness of her grand-aunt's voice and manner, and wondered why she had been so afraid of her during that uncomfortable sojourn on the garden seat.

When the shadows were falling round Lynncourt, and the last streak of crimson

had disappeared behind the group of firs, little Esty and Dolly passed out through the gate, where the griffins looked darker and more threatening than in the morning sun.

Esty's hands were filled with rare flowers, and her nurse's arms were weighed down by a large basket of fruit which Lady Renshawe had assisted to pack in the cool green leaves, saying:

"There, Esther, take them to your mother, and say I should be glad if they would all come and spend the day here next week; but mind, *you* are to come again to-morrow. Good-night, dear!"

## CHAPTER IV.

“He has the eyes of youth; he speaks holyday;  
He writes verses; he smells April and May!”

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

TWELVE months passed away, and again the rushes that grew so thickly on the margin of the Gardenhurst lake began to throw brown shadows into the depths below. This past year had been one of great anxiety and fatigue to the new tenants of Gardenhurst.

If there is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, there were in this case very few miles between magnificence and poverty. Lady Renshawe was rich, possessor of lands, carriages, and servants; and Colonel Lisle, the future heir of Lynncourt, was poor, had no carriages, had a tumble-down house, and only three servants.

Lady Renshawe received piles of letters, which, as a rule, she declined to open, because, she said, they were sure to be begging-letters or circulars.

Colonel Lisle also received many epistles, but his objection (which was very great) to opening them arose from a painful consciousness that they would contain demands for that immediate attention he was so unable to accord them. As they had so little money, and as Mrs. Lisle was a woman of strong practical, as well as of imaginative, genius, she found a good deal of personal labour for herself and her children to accomplish during the time they were moving into their new home.

From six in the morning to six in the evening would Mrs. Lisle toil incessantly, assisting in papering rooms, making carpets, covering chairs; all labour seemed to come within the compass of her deft fingers and inventive talent. Colonel Lisle would frequently pause in his morning parade before

the windows, and take his cigar from his lips, saying: "Good heavens, Elinor, what a rag-bag you look!" as he witnessed the wife of his bosom, with her dress tucked up decisively round her waist, and her face and finely-moulded arms covered with dabs of paste.

The boys, as usual, did their utmost to retard their mother's progress, by kindly fighting over the heavily weighted slips of paper that had to be handed up to Mrs. Lisle, as she stood in an exalted position on a rickety ladder, waiting to smooth away the wrinkles as she laid the pieces on the wall. Having one day, in their officious eagerness, nearly upset the ladder, Mrs. Lisle, pastepot, and all, they were dismissed the room, and were succeeded by Dolly, who was a much more effectual assistant.

Meanwhile, Lady Renshawe's ponderous old-fashioned coach had paid many a visit to the Gardenhurst Lodge; it was not always tenanted by the countess, as she

was averse to going out beyond the length of her stately garden walks; but it generally brought some timely gift of fruit or game, together with some civil message to Mrs. Lisle, and an entreaty that little Esty might be spared to come back in the carriage, and spend the evening at Lynncourt.

Lady Renshawe did not easily get over the distaste she had formed for her ungrateful nephew and his unwelcome wife; but she had taken a strong fancy to the young face that had come the first to break a solitude of nearly twenty years' duration, and she strove to please the parents for the sake of the child.

So Colonel Lisle was welcome to eat as many dinners and read as many papers as he liked at Lynncourt; but the former was a privilege he rarely availed himself of, as Lady Renshawe's repasts, although served on magnificent plate, and attended with due solemnity by the great Mr. Lintoff, were generally of the simplest description, and

it suited Colonel Lisle better to eat a chop served up hissing and hot by Dolly's clean nimble fingers, than to wait while the same fare grew cold under the deliberate attendance of the Lynncourt butler.

Besides which, his vanity and sense of dignity were always being "rubbed the wrong way" by the caustic remarks of his venerable relation.

"Aha, James!" she would say, with a malicious chuckle, "you've taken to spectacles uncommonly early, and I do declare you're more grey than I am," or "My dear James, how you walk! Like a porpoise (she meant tortoise), I declare; look at *me*!" And she would speed down the path with an activity that gave little promise of her leaving her high-heeled shoes vacant for her nephew to wear for many a day to come.

"The catamaran!" the latter would say, indignantly, as he watched the movements of her poke-bonnet as it bobbed up

and down among the flower beds. "She's immortal, by Jove!"

To Elinor, Lady Renshawe was more conciliating. There was much in the character of the high-minded, active mother that assimilated with the elder lady's acute intellect and untiring energy; and when one day the countess's black silk bonnet and Roman nose unexpectedly appeared in the Gardenhurst drawing-room, and she found Elinor immersed in the mending of what seemed inexhaustible holes in the boys' stockings, she said kindly, "My dear, how can you go on mending those uninteresting pieces of merino, with that half-finished face looking at you from the easel?" and when Mrs. Lisle had answered, wearily, that her work must be finished, as the boys, in the language of Dolly, "hadn't a bit of sock to their feet," the old lady had sat promptly down, hoisted the gold-rimmed spectacles, and worked energetically for about an hour—a piece of practical kind-

ness which did more to bring the two together than any elaborate plan Colonel Lisle could have ever hit on to reconcile his aunt and to pacify his wife.

After this little incident, Lady Renshawe bestirred herself to confer more substantial favours on her relations than could be conveyed in presents of hares and partridges, for which, as Mrs. Lisle used sadly to remark, "she always had to give a shilling to the bearer."

She sent the two boys to Winchester—a step which was much needed for their benefit, although, as the countess remarked, pathetically, "it was money thrown into the sea, as far as Gerald was concerned;" for "it was easy to see that he'd never come to any good." However, both he and Egbert were made the happy possessors of shining black hats, and other little proprieties of costume necessary for public school—"men;" and one sunny morning they departed for the railway station, their

little faces looking somewhat woeful as they rolled off in the solemn Lynncourt chariot. They drove their knuckles into their eyes, in a most suspicious fashion, when they caught the last glimpse of Toby's head, as he struggled desperately to get free from Esty's arms, to join his old companions. Esty standing on the door-step that day with her finger in her mouth, and the hot tears welling down her somewhat dirty cheeks, made a resolution born of penitence and remorse.

"If they ever come back," she sobbed, "I'll let Egbert have the biggest share of apple dumpling on Sunday, and I'll never tell Gerald again that he is a sneak for bowling at my legs at cricket." Then turning round to join little Christine, who was busily picking up yellow apples under the apple tree, Esty gave vent to her excitement in such piteous moans and tears, that Christine, quite moved and scared by such unwonted emotion on her sister's part, came

up crying too, for company, gently urging the offer of a half-eaten apple on her, as the only adequate means of consolation she possessed.

Peace now reigned in the Gardenhurst household. Mrs. Lisle, less fettered by maternal cares, and having succeeded in transforming the long uninhabited house into as comfortable a domestic residence as their small means permitted, was at length able to rest herself in the enjoyment of more congenial occupations. And now, as soon as breakfast was despatched, and household orders disposed of, she would draw her easel up to the window, and sit for hours entranced in her occupation, and listening vaguely to Colonel Lisle's trenchant but totally inapplicable criticisms, or to Esty's gentle voice, as she sat rolling out big words from Franklin's translations of the Greek plays, words which came oddly from her little mouth, but which it pleased Mrs. Lisle to hear, and which

did not displease Esty, for, as soon as her ears became familiarised to the hard words, she was able to glean some comprehension of the tragic stories and their dark beauties; and her eyes used to light up with that look of glistening enthusiasm one rarely sees but in the eyes of children, when she read out the mad eloquence of Cassandra's futile prophecies, or the sad pleadings of Agamemnon's sacrificed daughter.

Esty was now thirteen years of age, and for her had commenced what was to be the happiest portion of her life. Heretofore the companionship of her brothers had kept the masculine element in her nature almost entirely in the ascendant; emulation of their boyish feats of strength had made her as expert a climber of trees, and as fearless a rider of the shaggy Shetland pony, as Gerald or Egbert themselves; and she would receive blows on the face from their hard hit cricket balls with a stoicism that endeared her much to those unscrupulous

urchins, who, by a few words of commendation as to her "pluck," and her qualifications as being a "regular trump," could reconcile her to any amount of physical ill-usage. "Christine was no good," they would say, contemptuously, regarding the delicate beauty of their fairer and more timid sister with great disdain.

"If you so much as run after her, she cries and tells mamma."

And, indeed, this was a species of persecution peculiarly objectionable to the plump and nervous little girl, who would run from them, with her feet pattering as quickly as those of a scared chicken, till she sank on the ground in a paroxysm of unreasoning terror, beseeching them, piteously, "Not to!"

But now the boys were gone, and Christine could pursue her favourite occupation of sucking her fingers and dressing her doll in peace and quietness. She would sit still thus for hours, singing in a low

voice tuneless little songs, in evidence of her content; and Dolly would say of her, with admiration, "her pinafore was the cleanest and her face the sweetest in the house."

My heroine—for it may be already evident to my readers, that unkempt, untidy, bright-eyed Esty, is to be my heroine—had not been, up to this date, an especial favourite of any one, excepting Lady Renshawe, on whom the burthen of Esty's faults rarely fell. The latter was the plague of Dolly, and the especial annoyance of her father, who complained that her presence was as baneful to his library as that of the goblin in fable land, who visited houses for the express purpose of causing endless trouble and confusion. If his ink disappeared, be sure it was Esty who had carried it off, and who would be discovered in a corner, concocting romances in a weak, straggling hand. In these early effusions German barons would behave with great ferocity

to lovely wives, who would assuage their husband's cruelty, and console their own wounded spirits, by bringing a son and heir into the world, many months before the time that more experienced narrators would have allowed for such an event.

If the books in the shelves were put up the wrong side upwards, it was Esty who had so misplaced them; in fact, she took the position that is generally assumed by cats among delinquent housemaids, and bore the blame of nearly all small domestic misfortunes.

At this age she could scarcely be called a pretty child. The fairness of her skin was generally obscured by sun tan; her hands, so small, brown, and thin, might have belonged to a monkey; and her eyes, blue and bright as they were, made her face look more weird, shining as they did from under untidy masses of brown hair. By the side of Christine's angelic loveliness Esty looked what Dolly often apostrophised

her as, namely, an "imp," and her general demeanour scarcely added much attractiveness to her personal appearance. The only person for whom she felt much affection was Christine; she enjoyed the meek homage the gentler disposition accorded her, and she felt a loving pity, slightly tinged with contempt, for a child who couldn't ride two yards unless Esty held her on, and who couldn't invent any original pastime without her sister's aid and suggestions. On more than one occasion poor Christine nearly fell a victim to her faith in Esty's prowess. Colonel Lisle, walking leisurely round the ground one morning, heard weak cries of distress coming from the direction of the round pond, as it was called, a pond situated in a secluded part of the Gardenhurst shrubbery. On arriving at the spot, he beheld his youngest darling's angel face bespattered with chickweed, and her fair hair trailing in company with water weeds, which, like the Naiads' sedgy crowns, sur-

mounted her "ever harmless looks," while Esty, in a still more woeful plight, was making frantic efforts to pull Christine out of the mud in which her white legs were immersed.

The fact was, Esty had persuaded her sister to come on board her boat, the said boat consisting of an old washing-tub, which Esty had purloined from the wash-house; and in this "seasoned vessel," as Esty called it, the two little girls purposed to make a tour round the world, *i.e.* round the pond. Fortunately for their ultimate safety, as they were pushing off from the shore by means of a line pole, Christine's habitual nervousness caused her to make a sudden movement to rise, which movement capsized the vessel and its cargo, sufficiently near shore to have no worse effect than to upset the two adventurers into the mud, from which Colonel Lisle extricated them, to the great detriment of his spotless fingers.

“On my word, Esther,” said the irate father, giving her an angry shake at arms’ length as though she were an objectionable Skye terrier, “you deserve to be well flogged!”

And, indeed, when Dolly discovered the state the children were in on their return home, she applied a hairbrush so vigorously to Miss Esty’s shoulders, that she drove that young lady to take refuge in a high tree, from which altitude the prisoner avenged herself by making all the most insulting grimaces at Dolly that she could invent; and in that occupation, so aggravating to her helpless enemy, and so entertaining to herself, she found consolation for her tingling ears and smarting shoulders.

## CHAPTER V.

“Why, what a madcap hath Heaven lent us here!”

KING JOHN.

“No fountain from its rocky cave  
E’er stepped with foot so free;  
She seemed as happy as a wave  
That dances on the sea.”

WORDSWORTH.

WHEN her brothers had been gone some weeks, the taste for these freaks gradually died away in Esty’s mind, and there began to be born in her that delicious sense of awakening intelligence which makes life such a day-dream of delight to those who have been gifted with souls quick to appreciate the mental fruit they consume with the fresh avidity of youth. Reading had come to Esty very much by the same desultory chance as that to which Topsy imagined her existence was due—“it grewed.”

Of regular education she received but little, for Mrs. Lisle had been so disheartened by her futile attempts to render Flora accomplished, that she utterly declined to spend money or time on Esty, saying, "if she has talent it will develop itself; if not, what is the good of my spoiling her life and my own by attempts to give her to eat what she cannot digest?" And so she gave her younger daughters no other advantage than that of living constantly in her society—an advantage which Esty involuntarily improved. Impressionable as all young things are, she contracted a tone of refinement and an aspiration for art, rare in ordinary children of that age, but not wonderful in one who possessed a keen imagination and great susceptibility to beauty, and who breathed in that little unfurnished painting-room the very atmosphere of poetry and culture.

Her life at this period was as wild and

untrained as the Virginia creeper that clambered round the Gardenhurst windows. Most of her summer mornings were spent in the rushes and long grass by the side of the lake, and she would lie still for hours, drinking in the beauty of sky and earth, and watching the long dragon-flies, with their blue bodies and tremulous wings, as they whirred and gleamed "a living flash of light" through the reeds; or, with a Waverley Novel in her hand, she would read with kindling eyes of the clash of arms that stirred through King Louis's line of Scottish guard when the Burgundian envoy flung his glove at his royal master's feet, for there was a little of the boy element still in her disposition, and as yet her sympathies ran more with the soldier heroes of romance than with the hopeless lovers. Still she wept bitterly over the dark fate of Edgar of Ravenswood, and his sad-faced Lucy, and she hated Lady Ashton, as only the young *can* hate.

Her days passed away like a pleasant dream, filled with confused fancies, in which Ivanhoe, Harry of Perth, Rebecca, Henry V., and the numberless heroines of the Arabian Nights, figured most conspicuously. It was pleasant to get away from Dolly and the agonies she inflicted by means of frilled muslin frocks that grated the bare shoulders, and shoes which, with a Chinese notion of beauty, she insisted on having too small for Esty's feet. It was pleasant, I say, to get away from these, to kick off the shoes and sit undisturbed behind the library door, where, with the roses peering in through the opened window, and summer insects making soft buzzing noises through the air, Esty could sit crouched out of sight, with her last purloined book in her hand. Like a dog with a bone, she generally preferred privacy for the consumption of her prey, and there, in the very last place Colonel Lisle would think of searching for his audacious

daughter, she would sit, peopling the old-fashioned English garden with veiled Georgians, tinkling lutes, gushing fountains, and many other unattainable luxuries described in the enchanted regions of the Arabian Nights.

I am bound to confess that my little heroine hardly made her life so pleasant to others as it was to herself, for in those unquiet hours when she was not entranced in the perusal of some romance, she still retained enough of original sin in her composition to cause much annoyance to the other members of her family: the instincts of youth are generally so much more human than divine!

Esty was alike passionate and tender-hearted, brave and mendacious. She was truthful under the influence of a kind word, but lied unscrupulously when ruled by severity; she felt exceedingly tender towards all dumb animals; never herself taking the life of a fly or a worm excepting by accident, and

that rarely, for her little feet would move aside for a creeping insect as instinctively as horses spare the fallen men that cumber their feet in battle. "You did not give the life," she would say to Gerald, who was not so scrupulous, "what right have you to take it?" and when Gerald would reply, sulkily, that she might as well say they "oughtn't to have meat for dinner," the little maiden would answer, gravely, "that she wasn't quite sure they ought, but at any rate Gerald, you don't want to have sparrows or cockchafers for dinner, so pray let them alone."

The feuds of Gerald and Esty had extended over a long space of time, and dated from one of those evenings in town when the boys used to come trooping home from their day-school in the suburbs. On one of these evenings Gerald had been unusually irritating in his manner to his sister, had called her a "miserable tom-tit" in allusion to her diminutive size, and had announced

to her that not only he, but his little finger held her in derision! To add to her indignation, Egbert, her favourite Egbert, had joined in the denunciation, and furthermore had added, "that she was only a girl," and with that parting sneer, the two boys had walked off to bed, leaving their small enemy in a state of fury which would have done credit to a tragedy queen.

She raved, stamped, and clenched her brown hands, and reiterated bitterly, "only a girl, am I? only a girl!" and then she began to meditate vengeance.

When the next evening arrived the boys came back to tea in a more cheerful frame of mind, but Esty received them in sullen silence, which she intended for dignity, and utterly refused all overtures for peace. So they left her alone and went to seek for their own especial means of enjoyment,—Gerald for his favourite knife, Egbert for his equally adored whiptop. They came back from their rooms with

suspicion and anger on their countenances : the top and knife had alike vanished ; in their place there was nothing left but a blank space, and the gravest doubt of Esty's honesty ; but she, on being interrogated by her elders, swore so solemnly that she knew nothing about it that they were compelled to rest satisfied for the while, and to sit down to tea without solving the mystery of the lost toys.

There was a huge cake for tea, and Flora presiding over it with all the dignity of elder sisterhood, cut each child a piece, and handed it to them on a plate.

In the excitement of the moment, Esty, with an impulse purely childish and animal, half rose from her seat, the better to reach her short arm across the table to meet the coveted food.

That movement was fatal ; for, relieved from the weight that had kept them on the shining wicker surface of the chair, off rolled the top on to the floor ; in another

moment Gerald had pounced on his knife, and Esty sat a detected criminal, with cheeks the hue of crimson. There was an exclamation from Dolly of "Lawk a mercy!" and a pause.

The boys were ready to explode in torrents of wrath, but all eyes instinctively turned towards Flora, as being the superior in age and most unbiassed as an arbitress.

"Esty!" she said in a voice sad but firm, "Esty, how did you come by those things?"

"She took 'em, of course," indignantly broke in Gerald.

"Hold your tongue, do, Gerald," said the elder sister; then she repeated the question.

Esty sat sullen and silent. She would have lied again if she could, but the facts were too strong against her; so she only hung her head and glared fiercely at Gerald.

"It is very evident," continued Flora, solemnly, "that you took these things either

with the view of causing wanton annoyance to your brothers, or for the purpose of keeping them for yourself, and thereby committing a theft. My decision is, that you shall not have any cake for tea!"

And she ruthlessly took away the culprit's plate; and, for the tempting mass of currants and plums, substituted a piece of dry bread.

Justice was satisfied. Every one felt that the punishment was adequate to the offence. Even the boys were content, and Esty sat and sulked, and repented that she had not found a better hiding-place. The method she had taken of concealing her prizes may seem somewhat singular, but it was a common practice with the Lisles' children, who never seemed to feel quite happy about their little household gods unless they sat upon them, after the manner of Rachel!

When Gerald and Egbert returned home after their first half spent at school, they

found only Christine and Toby waiting at the gate to welcome them, and in answer to their indignant queries as to "where Esty was?" they were told that she was gone "to stay with her grand-aunt at Lynncourt," the fact being that Lady Renshawe had observed with pleasure the gradual weaning of her little favourite from all those pursuits which had made her, as Dolly said, "such a tom-boy," and had petitioned Mrs. Lisle to let her take the child home for a time; and Mrs. Lisle had assented, feeling that the sound of Esty's and Gerald's wrangling was an infliction she would be glad to be free of during the boys' winter holidays. The next day little Esty, sitting in the deep recess of the window in the Lynncourt library, suddenly heard a tapping and whispering going on close to her head.

Starting from her reverie, she turned; and, behold, outside there were the rosy faces of her brothers, grinning from ear to ear,

as they made energetic signs to her to open the window. This she did with difficulty, as the frost had set the windows fast in their frames, and while the snow blew in against her face she had to listen to their hurried entreaties that she'd come home and have "a lark."

"The pond is frozen over, and it's such jolly sliding," said Gerald.

"The cat has kittened, and there are two kittens kept. Such pink noses! such snow-balls, Esty!" suggested Egbert, insidiously; and then, in chorus, "Oh, Esty, do come home; it must be so jolly dull here!" At that moment the apparition of a large black bonnet rose before Esty's terrified gaze. Before her, but behind them, stood Lady Renshawe, her nose looking more than usually prominent, from the red tinge the cold had given it, her feet encased in huge snow-boots, and her general aspect severe and threatening. Esty gave a faint "Oh!" and the boys, turning round, beheld

the enemy, and, darting hastily round the corner, disappeared more quickly than they had come. Lady Renshawe looked after them with a smile, as their lithe figures bounded down the avenue, the flakes of snow clinging to their stiff, yellow curls.

"No, no, dear," she said when she came in to where Esty sat, looking rather rueful and home-sick; "I can't part with you yet," and the old lady kindly brought down a new book of engravings to engage the attention of her little favourite, and Esty was partly consoled, although she thought a good deal of home that night, of the boys, of Christine's soft voice, of her mother's nightly kiss, and, above all, of the new, white kittens.

And so the days passed happily to Esty Lisle during the interval between childhood and girlhood. What was it to her if her mother looked sad, and her father became more irritable as every post brought in bills, some of them inevitably incurred,

others being the ghosts of poor Colonel Lisle's old follies, haunting him with dreadful persistency, finding their way from the club to his former town address, and from thence to the country. What was it to Esty that sugar was forbidden in her tea, and salt butter substituted for fresh ! After breakfast-time in the summer she and Christine lived almost entirely on the fruits they themselves collected out of doors ; they ate basket after basket full of green apples, and, thanks to the digestion of youth, escaped with no other bad consequences than consisted in a few extra scratches on Esty's face and arms, and an additional tinge of brown on her peach-like cheeks. She knew where the first strawberry hung ripening under its shielding leaf ; she was quickest to detect the existence of the red-streaked poisons, and would clamber to pluck them down from a height which appeared to Christine wonderful and terrible.

“ Oh, Esty, Esty !” her little sister would shriek, piteously, “ do come down ; ’ool be killed ! I know ’ool be killed !”

And Esty would reply by mounting the topmost branch, and clinging round it in the fashion of a cat, and then saying in a faint and exhausted voice, “ Oh, Christie, I’m going to drop ! indeed I am !” and then seeing Christine toddle off to procure assistance from the house, Miss Esty would descend with immense alacrity, for these feats were apt to be punished by Dolly or Mrs. Lisle in a way more salutary than pleasant to the offender.

Christine regarded her sister with mingled awe and devotion. Esty was to her an incarnation of heroism ; wicked, certainly,—for was not almost every act of her life in defiance of righteous authority, but still fascinating ! a girl who could climb trees in utter defiance of chances of dislocation of limb ; who could ride the pony when he was in his most obstinate mood ; and who could

pour into Christine's wondering ears such beautiful stories of desert islands, enchanted princesses, and their concomitant dragons: was not this a girl to be worshipped?

Christine thought so: and if it had not been for the occasional castigation with which her sister's ears and hands were saluted in acknowledgment of her faults, I believe she would have considered Esty in the light of something superhuman—a beautiful, bold, bad spirit, whose daring effrontery and powers of invention lifted her far above the level of ordinary little girls; and even these punishments were borne with such stoical calmness as might easily have led anyone to imagine that Esty had a skin as invulnerable as that of Achilles.

So the hours of Esty Lisle's youth passed happily enough. She delighted alike in the consumption of yellow apples and old-fashioned romances. With one of these latter she would dream away the

summer hours among the dense thickets afforded by the sweet-scented azaleas and purple rhododendrons in the overgrown shrubberies.

There, perched on a knoll of grass, her hand full of wild strawberries, she sat so still that the hare would steal from bush to bush close to her feet and not heed her, and the thrush would pour forth its song of trills close to her ear, unconscious that the motionless downcast head, on which the sun shot such golden-brown lights, was aught human ; and then, when tired for awhile of reading the fable in her hand, the girl would put her book down ; and, resting her head on her hand, listen with a thrill of strange delight to the sighing of the wind through the boughs, and stare up at that blue sky that seemed so far away, wondering whether anything *there* could be so beautiful as the sunny world below in which she was thus passing so many sweet idle hours away.

## CHAPTER VI.

“Though now this grained face of mine be hid  
In sap-consuming winter’s drizzled snow,  
And all the conduits of my blood froze up;  
Yet hath my night of life some memory,  
My wasting lamp some fading glimmer left,  
My dull deaf ears a little use to hear.”

FOUR YEARS had passed, and again Esty Lisle sat in the recess of the library window at Lynncourt—it was twilight—a dull December twilight, and the snow hung heavily on the gaunt branches of the skeleton trees without, while the deer walked in forlorn lines across the snow-covered sward, their little footprints being rapidly filled up by the thick flakes that kept constantly falling. This time, no little brothers were present to press their rosy faces against the congealed panes and clamour for their sister’s return to the charms of home, of

white kittens, and long slides. Miss Lisle was now a young lady, for whom the last amusement, at least, had ceased to possess any attraction ; while the two brothers, then so careless and rosy, were fast growing into troubled, sharp-faced young men.

Egbert had retained most of his original freshness of complexion and lightness of heart, for he had entered the navy, and being known for a poor man, met with but small temptation to trouble his spirit and empty his pocket ; but Gerald—Gerald, who had been put into the “ Guards ” in order, as his father said, proudly, that “ the heir of Lynncourt should move in a good set ”—to him came many an anxious care spared to the less pretentious position of his younger brother, Gerald, who could not look Poole in the face, who felt nervous and cross when any friend saluted him with a tap on the shoulder ; Gerald, with his numerous intrigues and complications of every description, was less to be envied than his

sisters, dreaming away their young lives amidst the pleasant glades of Gardenhurst and Lynncourt, were wont to imagine. When they saw him drive off to the station after one of his somewhat brief visits home, with a faultlessly cut coat, a perfect tie, an incipient but much cultivated fair shadow of a moustache, and one of Harding's yellow rosebuds in his button-hole, they would retire rather wondering from whence the income came that could furnish such magnificence, and whose the photograph could be which they had seen lying on Gerald's dressing-table the night before; a photograph which represented a thick-faced woman with dark eyes and innumerable frizzles of short, black curls, that shadowed the beetling brows, with a long, pointed collar, a full bust and diminutive waist. Pondering deeply over these mysteries, Esty and Christine Lisle would picture to themselves scenes of vague delight in that far-off London, of which

Gerald spoke so carelessly as "town," and wondered whether fate or chance would ever lead their steps that way. "Perhaps Flora might ask them up one day;" but this was not a probable contingency, for Flora, who had married the curate of the London parish wherein the Lisles used to reside, was living in a little house in the suburbs of the metropolis, and, as it was, could hardly accommodate herself, her husband, and their own servant, in the narrow confines of "Nutshell Place."

The December evening I have mentioned was the close of a day which Esty had come to spend with her aunt, and at this twilight hour Lady Renshawe was snatching fitful slumbers in the recesses of her arm-chair by the fire-place, while her niece stared out of the window, watching the snow-flakes thicken against the pane, and longing for the time when all this snow and frost would melt off the grass, and the breath of spring would call out green shoots

and pink buds from the dry stalks in the rose-beds. Now and then she glanced tenderly at the sleeping form of her aunt, whose features were imperious as ever when lit by the flash of her still bright grey eyes, but who, now that the hard lines in her face were relaxed by repose, looked the very incarnation of helpless old age. Lady Renshawe's delicate, high-bred looking feet were cased in black satin slippers, and her hand rested lightly on the gold-headed cane by her side; the firelight, that played on her snow-white hair and wrinkled face, showed also, by the light of its ruddy glare, the portrait which hung overhead, and which represented the haughty beauty of Lynncourt, with red lips and raven hair. It was a charming portrait, life-size, painted by Opie when Lady Renshawe was seventeen, and its unchanging beauty seemed to mock the fading life that slept in the chair below it. Every now and then the sleeper awoke

from her light slumber, and called to Esty in sharp, querulous tones :

“ Esty, come and find my knitting-pins;” or, “ Esty, that nasty kitten has wrapped itself up in my ball of wool, and can’t find its way out again !” and Esty would come, and, after hunting the refractory kitten all round the room, unwind and rewind, with some difficulty, the skein in which the little creature had involved itself hopelessly, and which it had drawn at great length round the legs of the table. Then :

“ Esty ! now that you’ve done that, come and read me some of Jeremy Taylor !” and, with just the faintest sigh, and a look directed towards the window-seat, where fluttered the open leaves of “ Master Humphrey’s Clock,” Esty would sit down on a stool by her grand-aunt’s feet, and, while the fire crackled cheerily within, and the night gathered in on the glaring snow without, the sweet low voice of seven-

teen gave utterance to the quaint, peaceful words of comfort conveyed in the yellow, ill-printed page before her.

Lady Renshawe sat and listened—listened sometimes to the sob of the rising wind without—and then her thoughts wandered far away back into past seasons, when she was young and her niece was not in existence; but a glance at her own withered hand, or at Esty's youthful head, was sufficient to bring her back to the realities of old age and its infirmities, and, with a sigh, she told Esty to "put down the book;" then, lifting up her head:

"When I die," she said, musingly, "I shall leave behind me an unencumbered rent-roll, an estate free from charge, and a stainless reputation. And what will it avail me? Your father will muddle the estate, so that my ghost wouldn't know it, if it could come and inspect it twenty years later—(Hold your tongue, child; of course

your father expects to inherit the estate, and if he does, of course he *will* involve it hopelessly)—it's ill teaching an old dog new tricks, and James Lisle will always bank his money in a sieve; meanwhile, the appreciation of my reputation for probity and morality will exist only in the nine days that follow my death, while this dead preacher has left a memorial that has lasted from generation to generation—good words that will live when my marble monument (if it exists at all) will not be looked at by any who bear my name, or in whose veins my blood runs. Oh, me! what is the use of it all?" and Lady Renshawe gazed wearily in the fire, while she gently stroked the golden brown head by her side.

Esty was troubled by the sadness of her aunt's tone, and, not being able to think of any better mode of changing the conversation, suggested:

"Shall I ring for tea, aunt?"

"Yes!" said the old lady, becoming practical immediately; "and order the muffins to be toasted brown, they were white and leathery last night;" and, taking up her knitting-pins, she intimated by a sign that the reading was to be recommenced.

It had been a weary day for both guest and hostess. Lady Renshawe, whose mind was still so full of quick intelligence, mourned bitterly the decay of her fine frame. That her once firm step should have become so uncertain, her sense of hearing so dull, was a cause of hourly irritation to the active mind which had outlived strength of body.

She, like Esty, longed that the winter days should pass away, and be succeeded by spring. "I shall feel strong again, then," she thought. "Life isn't life, that exists in bitter frosts and northern winds; if I could only taste a breath of summer-air it would renew me," and certainly, as the

snow melted away from the earth, and the buttercups began to force their way through the thick sward of the lawn, Lady Renshawe did seem to taste fresh youth and strength with the spring of the year.

“James, my dear, you must take care of yourself,” the old lady observed mockingly, when her nephew came to see her one sunny April morning. “They say that the spring months are very fatal to people who are getting old ; now it don’t matter for *me* you know, mine is such a *very* fine constitution, I shouldn’t be at all surprised if I lived to be a hundred.”

Colonel Lisle could not repress a slight shudder at such speeches as these. To do him justice he had not any desire that his relative’s departure from this world should be accelerated on his account ; but still there is a limit to everything, and he could not but think it hard that she should contemplate prolonging her term of existence

beyond the usual period only, as it seemed, for the express purpose of annoying him; but as the spring and summer came and went, Lady Renshawe's prediction really seemed as though it were likely to be verified, for her eye grew brighter again, and she required Esty's support less often than usual during her promenade up and down the terrace. Her eye, too, was keener than ever to detect any disorder in the arrangement of her household, or that portion of the estate that was more immediately around her.

"How true it is that 'one walks in a vain shadow,'" she remarked benignly to Colonel Lisle. "Here am I 'heaping up riches,' and not knowing in the least who 'will gather them.'"

Poor James could only smile blandly and murmur "very true," and it was not until he got home that he revealed his real sentiments to the ears of his wife and daughter. "She's an old cat," he said, indignantly,

"and I believe has as many lives as one ; she can't cut me out of the title, but she knows that I'm as poor as a rat, and that if she chooses to leave away her personal property, I shall derive very little benefit from her death."

"Never mind," said his wife, soothingly ; "she never seems to see or care for any one excepting Esty, so it isn't likely she should leave it away from you ; she only says these things to tease you !"

"I don't know," answered the colonel, gloomily, "she has been talking a good deal about Geoffrey Adair lately."

"And who is Geoffrey Adair?"

"You never remember anything I tell you," said the colonel, in a testy voice ; "Geoffrey Adair is the son of her old friend, General Adair ; the father died some two years ago, leaving his only son to the mercy and care of his second wife and her two children by a former husband ; Geoffrey, by his father's desire, was put into the Guards."

"Why, that must be the same Captain Adair who is in Gerald's regiment," suggested Mrs. Lisle.

"Of course it is," answered her husband ; "I wonder you never found that out before," and he resumed his cigar with a look of sovereign contempt for his wife's ignorance, not deigning to listen to her asseverations that this was the first intimation she had ever received that any person bearing the name of Adair was in existence. Esty, had she been consulted, could have given her mother some information on the subject, for she had noticed and commented on the miniature of a pretty little boy that hung over Lady Renshawe's breakfast-room mantelpiece, and had been told that it was "the son of a very dear old friend of mine ; this was his only child by his first marriage, and as I knew and liked both the parents very much, I begged to have a likeness of their son ; they sent it to me when he was two years old."

"Then you have never seen the original?" Esty had asked.

"Never ; when his first wife (my friend) died, General Adair went and made a fool of himself by marrying a widow, a Mrs. Cadogan, who had two children by a first marriage ; after that they all went abroad, the last tidings I received from General Adair was, that he was living at Florence, and that Geoffry, his son, was pursuing his studies with a private tutor, with a view to entering the army."

"And you heard nothing more of them?"

"Nothing, excepting that poor Jasper (the general) died about two years ago, leaving the bulk of his property to his wife, which was generous of him, considering that she worried him to death. People said his lungs were affected and that he died of consumption,—*I* know better."

"What did he die of then?" demanded Esty, wonderingly.

"Of his wife's temper !" and for some

time after this conversation the countess was so snappish and contradictory of speech that Esty took care not to introduce the name of Adair into the conversation again.

Nevertheless, like the parrot, she "thought the more!"

Here was a fine field for conjecture and romantic speculations opened out, and of course the suggestive mind of seventeen "improved the occasion" as much as possible.

An only and petted child, deprived of his mother at an early age, handed over to the care of a stepmother who possessed a "temper" and two children of her own, left a friendless orphan by the death of his father, deprived of the larger share of his lawful inheritance by the machinations of his stepmother — this was the superstructure of Esty's romance, and many were the inventions and exaggerations her ingenious fancy formed out of these circumstances.

"I dare say she beats him cruelly," she

said to herself one day, when she was looking tenderly at the aforesaid miniature; then, struck by a sudden thought, she looked at the back of the portrait, and perceived that the object of her commiseration must be at least four-and-twenty years of age; she blushed at her own folly, and for a time put the ideal she had formed of the victimised orphan out of her head.

## CHAPTER VII.

“His father allows him two hundred a year,  
And he bets you ‘A thousand to one.’”

“ELINOR,” said Colonel Lisle to his wife, one June morning, as he inspected the contents of the letter-bag, “here is a letter from Gerald. I wonder what *that’s* about; he never writes to me unless he wants something?”

“What is it?” demanded Mrs. Lisle, anxiously. But her husband perused the letter twice before he gave her the satisfaction of knowing the cause of the heavy frown that had gathered on his forehead. When he laid down the letter it was with an angry thump of his hand against the table that made the knives and forks rattle and jump.

“D——d cool, I must say!”

“What is d——d cool?” asked his wife, calmly.

Whenever Colonel Lisle used intemperate language, Mrs. Lisle punished him by repeating the offensive words, partly because she knew he didn't like it, partly to give her time to frame a defence against the coming storm.

“D——d cool of Gerald, to expect me to go to the expense of entertaining his friends here, after all the money and trouble he has cost me already! Read the letter out, Christine.”

And Christine read as follows:—

“Guards' Club, Pall Mall.

“June —, 18—.

“MY DEAR GOV.

(“What expensive paper the puppy writes on!” growled the Colonel.)

“I am thinking of running down on Saturday to look you up; if you have no objection I should like to bring a friend

of mine with me; he is a very nice fellow, and, moreover, I owe him a few hundreds, so I should like to pay him any civility I can, short of actual cash. I hope you will not mind his putting up at Gardenhurst for a few days. I will bring you down a French cook, and please ask my mother to be sure and get a man in to wait.

“Ever your affectionate son,

“G. L. ”

“P.S.—We shall bring down a couple of hacks.”

“Here is another postscript,” said Christine, as she turned over the page, while her mother sat pale and motionless, horrified at the prospect conveyed in Gerald’s letter,—a prospect by no means agreeable to the already over-worked anxious house-keeper :

“I forgot to say that my friend’s name is

Adair. You have often heard me speak of him ; he is in my regiment."

Colonel Lisle and his wife exchanged glances, while Esty blushed so vividly that Christine, who was a close observer, detected her, and wondered what on earth Esty had been about.

"I shall not permit it," said the Colonel, excitedly ; "I am not going to be the means of introducing that young man to——"

"Hush !" interrupted his wife, with a meaning look at the girls ; "we will discuss that when we are alone, James ;" and accordingly, when the breakfast-things were cleared away, Mrs. Lisle accompanied her husband to his library, and, I suppose, used some very good argument to induce him to accept of the proposed visit of Gerald and his friend ; for when the post-boy left Gardenhurst with the letters that day, he carried with him one addressed to "Gerald Lisle, Esq.," in which Colonel Lisle expressed the satisfaction it would give him

to welcome Captain Adair to his "unpretending household."

When their parents left the breakfast-room the two girls looked at each other without speaking for a few moments, and then Esty said, significantly:

"Let us go and sit in the strawberry-beds;" which meant that these young ladies were about to follow the custom of savage tribes, and hold a "palaver."

"Christine," said Esty, solemnly, as they crouched down among the fresh green leaves, and began to pluck the berries from the stalks, "it's the *same*!"

"You mean it's the little boy in the picture you told me of," answered Christine, composedly, as she pounced on an unusually fine, ripe strawberry, and devoured it.

"Well, yes; no! but of course he can't be a little boy now, you know," said Esty, rather embarrassed; "he is in the same regiment with Gerald."

"Do you think he will really come

here?" asked Christine, awe-stricken at the idea of the "little boy" of Esty's romances being converted into a full-grown man like her brother.

"And do you think he will be as disagreeable as Gerald? because you know, Esty," added Christine, meditatively, "*I* think Gerald is a snob."

"Why?" demanded Esty, rather astonished at her sister's unusual decision of manner.

"Because mamma told me that snobs were pretentious people, who assume more than they are entitled to; and while Gerald gives himself all the airs of a rich, fine gentleman, when he knows how poor he is, I must think that he is snobbish; besides," added Christine, warming with her subject, "what right has he to expect us to alter our style of living because he is going to bring one of his friends here, and why should he insult mamma with suggestions of French cooks and men waiters? What

is good enough for mamma is good enough for him and his friends."

"But Christy," pleaded Esty, rather disturbed at this digression, which was tending to inculcate a rebellious state of feeling against the proposed visitors. "Captain Adair may be accustomed to live in an altogether different way from what we do, and that may be the reason why Gerald——"

"Then," interrupted Christine, "he needn't come here, and if he don't like us when he does come, he can soon go back again," and Christine resumed her search among the strawberry leaves with such dignity of manner, that Esty thought it wisest not to discuss the question any further for the present.

Christine Lisle was now a little more than thirteen years old, but her grave, gentle manner made her appear older than she really was; in personal appearance too she was more formed and far more beautiful than most girls of her age. Braid after

braid of bright fair hair was twisted round the back of her well-shaped head, while her white forehead, pink cheeks, and deep-blue eyes, presented a most brilliant combination of nature's colouring. She was slower in her movements than her more volatile sister, and generally walked with a soft indolence of manner that would have been inexpressibly charming to some people, while it would have driven others distracted with irritation. She was unusually shrewd for a girl so young, and who had seen so little of the world; but then she had lived in a large family on small means; and adversity, especially if it be accompanied by brothers and sisters, is an immense sharpener of woman's "apprehensions," as Mrs. Malaprop calls them.

Esty had spent so many days of the year at Lynncourt, that she could not realise so well as did her sister all the rigour of poverty that reigned in the Gardenhurst household. It was Christine who had seen

all the anxious looks of her mother when the weekly bills came in. It was Christine who had watched Mrs. Lisle's tears fall on Gerald's unreceipted "accounts" until her fair young face grew hot with indignation, and accordingly she was better able to appreciate and condemn the selfishness that caused her mother to reduce daily the quality of the meals to such an excess of plainness, and spend hours trying to diminish inevitable expenses.

"Christine!" said Esty, in the pause that followed Christine's outbreak of indignation; "what are we to wear?"

This was a question to arouse any girl's interest, however young she might be, and to put all less important considerations to flight.

Christine looked blank. "There isn't much choice," she said, "we have only these lilac cotton gowns and the white muslins."

"Never mind," suggested Esty, consolingly. "In most novels heroines are

dressed in white muslins, and look an embodiment of youthful freshness and beauty to the distraction and admiration of the town-bred lover."

"That's all very well," said Christine, prosaically. "But if all town-bred men are like Gerald, Captain Adair will be disagreeably particular as to the fit of your gloves and boots, and will feel himself personally aggrieved by the wrinkles in the back of your dress. Oh! I do wish he wasn't coming, we were so comfortable without him." And in her perplexity she sat deliberately down in the middle of the strawberry bed, much to the detriment of the lilac cotton dress, and stroked her white nose thoughtfully.

Presently she lifted her head, struck by a sudden thought.

"Do you think Aunt Renshawe would?" she began in an insidious tone.

"No, I'm sure she wouldn't," interrupted Esty, decidedly; and so the conversation

flagged again for a while. Christine had no further suggestion to offer ; and Esty's thoughts wandered off into a day-dream—a dream in which she and Christine figured as the possessors of untold wealth and fashionably-cut silk dresses. A dream in which Captain Adair appeared dimly in the background as one of many worshippers of their surpassing elegance and beauty.

Like the visionary in the Arabian Nights, Esty was rudely awakened from her flattering meditations.

“ Miss Esther come and feed the chickens ! ”

And our old friend Dolly appeared in sight, her voice more tremulous and cracked than formerly, and her manner quite as aggressive as in the old days when she was in the habit of applying the hair-brushes to Esty's shoulders.

“ Oh Dolly, don't bother,” said the latter, pettishly, “ we'll come directly.”

Certainly it was irritating to be disturbed at the moment imagination was supplying Esty with luxuries far beyond her reach in reality.

Christine got up slowly.

"We're not doing any good here, Esty," she remarked, "so I will go and help mamma to count the linen from the wash, and you might as well feed the chickens as sit there in the sun burning your face."

Esty followed her sister's advice, but when the last grain of corn had been thrown to the chickens, and the hens had ceased to "cluck, cluck," and make frantic rushes in whatever direction they saw her little brown hand moving, she gathered up the basket on her arm, and, instead of going back to the house, returned to the strawberry beds; and, seating herself under the shade of a large twisted apple tree, resumed the thread of the romance she was weaving, undisturbed this time by aught excepting the humming of the bees that hovered round

the luscious petals of the azaleas, or the soft echo of a distant cuckoo's note.

It may seem strange that with so wealthy a relative living near them, the Lises should be still suffering from the effects of Colonel Lisle's early extravagance, but when it is remembered that Gerald Lisle inherited all his father's talent for spending money, and indulged this propensity at his parents' expense, it can easily be imagined, to use Lady Renshawe's own words, "that while there's such a leak as Gerald in the ship, she can never be sound."

So, when the countess had paid for her grand-nephew's education, and bought Gerald his commission in the army, and paid for Egbert's naval outfit, she thought that she had done her duty to them. After that, they might "sink or swim," as they liked.

"I've given them enough rope to save themselves," remarked the old lady, grimly. "If they choose to hang themselves, that's their look out!"

Having thus taken the greater burthen of home expenses off Colonel Lisle's shoulders, the countess imagined (naturally enough) that his income ought to be sufficient to keep himself and his family in a moderate degree of comfort, and that "Elinor must have plenty to spare now," more especially as the countess's kindness had not stopped at purchasing the commission, but gone to the extent of making each boy an allowance of £150 per annum. She forgot that the hand of debt once laid on a man is somewhat like the devilish gripe in ghostly tradition that leaves indelible traces on the wrist that has been clasped by its fatal pressure. And the curse James Lisle had laid upon himself in his youth was destined to come home to him in age,—reproduced in the person of his son.

It was very rarely, however, that the girls found their poverty any inconvenience to them; their taste in food now was as simple as when they climbed the trees for

apples, and thrust their little hands through nut boughs in their search for filberts in the days of their childhood. Their amusements were even a less source of expense now that they had outgrown the taste for wooden dolls and toy lambs that had distinguished them at an earlier period ; for whereas Christine had been rather indulged and pampered in her infancy in the way of playthings (on one occasion she had actually been presented with a wax doll, and preserved for many years afterwards a beautiful foot and leg, the sole relic and remnant of the once perfect whole), her amusements were now restricted to the following :

To meet Esty in the summer evening, when the latter returned from Lynncourt.

To pot flowers with her mother in the old dilapidated conservatory.

To feed the pets : consisting of a canary, a pony, and a little pig.

To sing like a nightingale.

To assist Dolly in the household work, even to the making of beds.

To lie still in the sun and read a novel, with a basketful of apples by her side.

These were her amusements now, some of them might be more properly classified as "duties;" but Christine was of such a contented temperament that she generally contrived to make one answer for the other.

Esty was equally satisfied with the occupation which fell to her lot. She was passionately fond of music, of flowers, and of books, and her mother's straitened means had never interfered with the indulgence of these tastes.

Flowers there were in abundance at Gardenhurst; where poor Mr. Ford had planted one rose, there now bloomed a dozen. The shrubbery paths were choked with the exuberance of untrained clematis and honeysuckle, while rare specimens of foreign plants grew side by side with the English dog-rose and flaunting dandelion.

In the early summer mornings, while the air was still fresh and sweet, Esty would pick her way down those walks where the gravel was least obscured by moss and weeds, and pluck handfuls of syringa, azalea, and rhododendron blossoms for her flower basket, while in her hand she carefully guarded the more fragile bells of the lilies of the valley, or the fragrant brown bud of the calicanthus.

She would arrange these flowers in every broken vase, or piece of glass she could find, that was capable of holding enough water to nourish the stalks ; under the influence of her nimble fingers and her exquisite taste, every dark corner in the old house became bright and graceful, the tazze that stood in the hall overran with tendrils of ivy and branches of Wistaria, while a mass of scarlet geraniums in the centre cup gave a brilliant effect to the whole picture.

Many of the beautiful marble tazze that

stand fixed in the polished floors of Florentine palaces look less picturesque than did the plastered imitations of Gardenhurst, when the grey edges of the latter were graced by overhanging leaves of the Virginia creeper ; and the bust of Venus, that stood in the niche of the hall window, looked none the less lovely for having a faint glow reflected on her pure cheek from the glass of red roses which stood near her.

As for the books there were not many more in the library, than when Colonel Lisle first took possession of Gardenhurst, but that made little difference to Esty. She loved her old friends among the novels, and felt as much pleasure in reading "Ivanhoe" and "Old Mortality," for the six and twentieth time, as though they were newly-made acquaintances of the highest sensational type. Certainly they possessed many advantages over more modern works of fiction, the principal one consisting in the fact, that she *could* read them again and

again, without tiring of them ; another was that her thorough knowledge of these works enabled her to proceed at once to the most amusing parts of the book, when she was in haste to be entertained.

As for music, it is true, the pianoforte at Gardenhurst was rather cracked and uncertain in its utterance. Esty might frequently strike at the treble notes and receive no sort of response from them ; but there was an instrument at Lynncourt of a superior order—a piano soft, full, and sweet in tone. Lady Renshawe did not play herself, but she was very fond of hearing music, or rather of being lulled to sleep by its sound ; and, accordingly, Esty had ample opportunities for indulging her love of soft, low chords and dreaming melodies. She had received very little regular tuition, but her ear was faultless, and the little lithe-some fingers that crept in and out among the great ivory keys, rarely affronted the hearer with any false note or awkward dis-

cord. Her music-books, like the novels, were of a by-gone school. Rossini was the latest operatic composer of whom Esty had an intimate knowledge. Her favourite pieces were to be found in the works of Beethoven and Handel, Griffin and Viotti.

In the dusk of summer evenings, when Lady Renshawe laid down her knitting-pins, and told Esty to "play some tune till the candles came," the latter would wait until her grand-aunt's hands relaxed their hold of the worsted skein, and her chin dropped on her breast, and then discontinued playing the old country dance, in which Lady Renshawe delighted, and wandered off into odd flute-like melodies, that seemed to harmonize well with the dull twilight, and the silence that reigned in the place—silence that was only broken by the occasional tinkling of a distant sheep-bell, or the twitter of a bird in the branches. Had it not been for the practical

nature of their poverty, there might have been some danger of this young girl's becoming a mere visionary. Her intellect was of the wild, untrained nature of her own garden bowers; she had been uncoerced as to any choice of studies, and had it been in her nature to rest satisfied with such a fate, she might have been almost as ignorant and uncivilized as Casper Hauser. But Mrs. Lisle had not misunderstood her girls' dispositions when she left them to work out the fight of their education in their own way. In the first place, they lived almost entirely in the companionship of herself and Lady Renshawe, their means not permitting them to be surrounded with that tribe of the upper servant class, who generally attend on the children of wealthy parents. Thus they contracted such a tone of refinement and good breeding, that they would have been "fit to hold a Court," as old Dolly expressed it, when other girls of the same age would perhaps have been too

arrogant or too awkward to do justice to their position.

Then their lives were so solitary, so unaccompanied by any of the ordinary pleasures of youth, that they pursued music, drawing, and reading as recreations; what others might have considered in the light of tiresome studies, were to them boundless sources of enjoyment. Esty's quick, keen intellect devoured eagerly all the food that came in its way, whether the object to be digested lay in music or painting, books, trees, flowers, or stones; and those hours of her girlhood passed at Gardenhurst, when her mind was intent, like the elf in the fable, on turning "Straw into Gold," that is to say, on working through ignorance to knowledge, were some of the happiest and best hours of her life.

So it happened that up to the date of Captain Adair's proposed visit to Gardenhurst, Esty and Christine had rarely been troubled by any reflection as to whether

their dresses did or did not come up to the usual requirements of society. Providing that the tight-fitting cotton frocks did not fit too tightly, and that there was no disagreeable "ruck" to irritate their round, white throats, the girls were quite satisfied with their appearance; and until the day when they came upon the photograph on their brother's table they were scarcely conscious that such gorgeously attired women existed as the one represented there.

To be sure, Phoebe Jenning, the clergyman's daughter, their one solitary "young lady" acquaintance, occasionally made her appearance at Gardenhurst, with variously-coloured velvet ribbons flying from her head, and with brilliant feathers standing up defiantly from her hat; but the effect of this finery was to fill the two girls with mild wonder; and, instead of Miss Jenning impressing them with a sense of her superiority as she fully intended to do by virtue of her gorgeous apparel, their instinctive

good taste revolted from the gaudiness of her style; without exactly knowing why, they felt that Phœbe's choice of colours was to be avoided rather than imitated. Of course there were moments of feminine irritation when Esty was not too magnanimous to forbear the wish that she could give Phœbe a good "set down" in the only manner in which the latter could be made to feel such a proceeding, namely, by Esty or Christine possessing a really well-made beautiful dress; but in the present state of Mrs. Lisle's finances such a contingency was not likely to arise.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Come care and pleasure, hope and pain,  
And bring the fated fairey prince."

WHEN Esty returned to Lynncourt the day after the discussion of "ways and means" in the strawberry beds, she was so absent in manner that her aunt had several times to remind her sharply that the teapot was not meant to be suspended long in the air in its transit from cup to cup, and that she would be better employed in doing some plain work than in pulling the rose leaves to pieces that fell from the silver vase on the table.

Esty did not mention to Lady Renshawe the cause of her abstraction. She felt instinctively that her aunt would not be likely to sympathise with any little maidenly

flutters on the subject of the proposed visitor to Gardenhurst. "Perhaps it would end in nothing, and he wouldn't come at all," said Esty, mentally apostrophising the curly-haired boy with the ivory face, but in her heart she half hoped that Colonel Lisle's invitation might be accepted, and she looked out with more eagerness than she was perhaps herself conscious for the postman in the morning on which an answer might be expected.

But when Captain Adair's letter arrived it was found that for the present Esty and Christine Lisle had nothing to fear from the criticism or observation of their brother's friend, for in large sprawling hieroglyphics the latter expressed his regret that at "present it was impossible for him to leave town." If "Colonel Lisle would kindly consent to consider the visit merely postponed, he would be very glad to avail himself of Colonel Lisle's kind invitation at some later period."

By the same post came a letter from Gerald, in which he said that he could not understand Adair's refusal, as the latter had so frequently expressed himself very anxious to make Lady Renshawe's acquaintance, but he durst say his friend would "run down" when the season was a little more advanced; anyhow, "he had seemed pleased at the invitation, and Gerald was much obliged to the governor for sending it."

I think that Mrs. Lisle was secretly a little disappointed at this answer to her husband's letter, although outwardly she expressed great satisfaction at being relieved from the burthen of entertaining a stranger. Even the least vain of women could hardly be expected to be the possessor of a precious gem and not desire that some eyes beside her own should be dazzled by its brilliance; and what mother could own daughters so rarely gifted and so charming in person as were Esty and Christine Lisle, and not feel a little motherly anxiety that such attrac-

tions should be seen and appreciated by some one nearer their own rank in life than Bill Markham, the farmer's son, who had a red face and a jovial manner, who rode a hundred guinea hunter to hounds, and who was wont to stare rather rudely at those delicate beauties when he encountered them wandering by the hedges of his native lanes, —looking even to his unrefined eyes like exotics out of place.

However the young man was not coming, and there was an end of it for the present. The transient gleam of speculation faded out of Mrs. Lisle's tired eyes, and in her return to her ordinary occupations she soon forgot everything connected with the name of Adair. Esty's memory was more retentive, the name of her hero of the portrait had become something more than a mere sound to her; but as the days went on the image of the unfriended, "persecuted orphan" became more and more dim in her imagination; her books, flowers, and music

were once more paramount in her thoughts, and while the birds sang and the sun was warm, while the summer days came and went with that dreamy peace which had such a charm to one of her temperament ; while Lady Renshawe was not captious, and Christine was gentle and sympathising, Esty Lisle felt that the hours had hardly room for her happiness—happiness none the less complete because it was shadowed by those vague aspirations for something hitherto unattained, that generally pervade the imaginations of those who are poetical rather than practical. But, although Esty might look with yearnings at the mountain-tops that overhung her “happy valley,” and wonder what kind of world it was the sun was shining on beyond, she fully felt the sweetness of the present hour, and looked forward to no future in which anything more charming could be found than her present way of life.

And so, by the time the Virginia creeper

that grew outside the Gardenhurst drawing-room had been burnt red by the autumn sun, and the apples were beginning to fall thickly under the trees, Esty and Christine had quite forgotten that their homely dresses had ever been any cause of dissatisfaction to them, and had forgotten also the reason of their having been so. Meanwhile, it shall be seen in another chapter what was the real cause of Captain Adair's declining the invitation of his friend, Gerald Lisle.

## CHAPTER IX.

“Her beauty calm and fresh and bright  
As Eastern summers are.”

DAVENANT.

“O my heart, my heart,—  
It sends up all its anguish in this cry:  
Love me a little!”

OWEN MEREDITH.

It was towards the end of June; the sun which was shining with such brilliancy at Gardenhurst, that blossom after blossom, first ripened and then shrivelled, fell beneath its power, was streaming with equal heat through the white blinds of a drawing-room, in H—— Street, Berkeley Square.

By the open window, her chair drawn into the shadow afforded by the muslin blind, sat Sophia Herbert, the wife of the conservative member for X——shire.

This lady, if her appearance did not belie

her, was young and charming. She had velvet brown eyes—eyes into which there came red gleams of light whenever they were agitated either by anger or pleasure.

She had brown, wavy hair of a colour that might have been called chesnut, were it not too dark and rich in its hue to quite justify the epithet. In the sun, this hair had a golden gleam over its smooth waves, but at night it looked almost black. Now it was gathered in braids round the back of Mrs. Herbert's head and was fastened in its place by a gold pin,—this pin being one of many ornaments that flashed and jingled over her *petite* person. *Petite* did I say? well! the rounded fingers were small enough, and so was the waist, and the feet would have done credit to a Japanese beauty; but the bust was large and full, and the throat almost too thick to be in good proportion with the small head, the complexion too was dusky, and though it was sufficiently clear to enable her to add a touch of rouge to her

cheek with great effect at night, by day it received no further embellishment than what was afforded by a pink sort of face-powder, which Mrs. Herbert used in preference to the ordinary powder, *blanc de perle*; otherwise her skin was like satin in its texture, and no man who had ever once had the privilege of touching that supple hand with his lips would be likely to forget the softness of it.

She had black velvet round her throat, heavy chain bracelets on her wrists, earrings that glittered at every movement of her head, a silk dress that fitted her with such exactness and which was of such thin material, that it showed every movement of her figure. In looking at this dress, you could not but feel, that there are decencies which are less proper than so-called indecencies. No fashionable maiden or matron at an evening party with her neck and back bare and exposed, could look half as suggestively improper as Mrs. Herbert did in

these morning dresses which she always had made in Paris.

Not that Mrs. Herbert affected impropriety as her style ; on the contrary, she was exemplary in her vocation as a wife and a mother. If on looking round the pretty little drawing-room in H—— Street, you saw no broken toy, no tattered book, to remind you of a child's presence, you could if you liked walk into excellently arranged nurseries, where these luxuries of childhood were strewn in profusion over sofa and chair, and the head-nurse could have told you that "mistress" always visited these regions, four if not six times a day. Then on those evenings when Herbert was able to get away from the House, to dine quietly at home, would not Mrs. Herbert resign any other engagement, however pleasant it might be, for the purpose of making herself as agreeable to her husband as possible,—and were not he and she always on the best possible terms? And

yet, in spite of her reputation for virtue, a reputation so unquestioned, that even the braggarts of the clubs had not ventured to boast away her good name; in spite of her three children, her regular attendance at church, and her scrupulosity of speech, there was occasionally a something in her manner (a something hard to be defined even by the person influenced by it), that irritated betrothed women if they saw their lovers exposed to it, and caused the man under its spell to feel as if he were becoming intoxicated by a subtle, indefinable pleasure, which was in some way conveyed to him by the look in Mrs. Herbert's eyes—the low melodious intonation of her voice—and the pressure of her soft fingers. The Herberts had been married ten years, but Sophy was even now in her husband's eyes the most beautiful and loveable woman in the world; while her sweetness of temper, and the efforts she made to please him, would have rendered

her charming, even had she not been so personally attractive.

On this particular afternoon Mrs. Herbert had an anxious expression on her face. It did not amount to a frown, but her eyes were troubled, and whenever the door-bell rang she started and moved slightly on her chair.

Slight as they were, such symptoms of emotion were not common to Sophy. She was of a placid temperament, and the gleam in her eyes I have spoken of was rarely seen even by those who knew her best. But that she was restless and ill at ease to-day was evident, even to the King Charles that nestled in the folds of her soft silk dress, for as soon as he had comfortably gathered up his paws under the shelter of his long drooping ears, he had to uncoil himself again and look with a discontented aspect at his mistress, who (unreasonably as he thought) kept continually disarranging him, that she might get up and press her

velvet cheek against the window-pane. Presently a ring resounded through the house, a ring that came from the front-door bell, which must have been pulled by a hand sure of its welcome. Mrs. Herbert probably recognised it, for she sank hastily into a chair, and with an air of listlessness began turning over the leaves of a novel. The sun, that was beginning to turn westward, reached her now, and the gold-brown threads of hair stirred lightly on her forehead as the door opened, and the servant announced, "Captain Adair and Mr. Lisle."

For an instant any one looking at Sophy might have detected an expression of disappointment in her face, but it must have been very momentary, for she came forward with the softest of smiles, and welcomed both gentlemen with a gentle pressure of her little hand :

"So kind of you to come and see me in my solitude," she said. "I am all alone

to-day, and you knowing that took compassion on me, Captain Adair."

There was an intonation in her voice which puzzled the latter for a moment, but only for a moment; then he answered:

"I met Lisle at the door, Mrs. Herbert. Great geniuses clash, you see; we were both bound on the same errand, and we neither of us could consent to forego our visit. We are fortunate in finding you in!"

And so a reproach was conveyed and an apology given for Gerald's presence, while he (poor, unsuspecting man!) twirled his moustache, and tried to think of something amusing to say to Mrs. Herbert, with whom he was very anxious to be on good terms. But he could think of nothing better to suggest than:

"Did you ride in the park this morning, Mrs. Herbert? I thought I saw you!"

"Yes," she answered, "and was much

astonished to see Damon there without his Pythias. What was Captain Adair about?"

She spoke of Geoffry, but never once looked at him. Yet she saw every movement of his hand as it lifted his watch-chain carelessly, and she knew exactly when he was looking at her through his half-shut blue eyes.

Talk of the eloquence that lies in a look! Let me tell you, oh husbands! for your guidance, that when your wife carefully avoids meeting the glance of any particular man, when her own eyes fall if they do inadvertently encounter his—if she talks AT him rather than TO him—then be assured that your doom is sealed, and that you are not likely to be more fortunate than Amphytrion, Menelaus, or any other similarly situated hero of antiquity, for there is more danger in such avoidance than in fifty of the "becks and wreathed smiles" she may bestow on others.

Mr. Herbert was not a far-seeing man, even had he been a jealous one, so it was not probable that he should detect what even Mrs. Herbert's lady's-maid had hitherto failed to discover. His wife was his property, and he believed in her even as he believed in the solidity of his well-built house, in the existence of his children, in his wife's own pleasant manners and affectionate disposition. His faith in Sophy was the result of ten years' happiness in married life. During all that time he had never had occasion to reproach her with any omission of duty. Every fresh year had made the tie stronger that bound them to each other, and unless Sophy herself were to commit some very glaring indiscretion, it was not likely that George Herbert's eyes, dimmed by long looking at his idol, should ever detect any flaw in what he held to be his faultless household deity.

Sophy was not a genius, but she was

shrewd, and she possessed a good deal of that which ensures greater success than mere unsupported talent.

She had tact ! tact to wound when it was required ; for, like all women, she was a little spiteful at heart, especially where her own sex was concerned ; and she had the tact also to make herself pleasant. She had a knack of slipping over people's "sore points" in conversation until they quite believed she had really escaped the sight of the wound she affected to ignore, and they loved her the better for it. What man forgives the woman who has seen him make an awkward step and fall down ? What woman forgives the friend who banters her on a subject on which her own heart is bleeding—who makes indiscreet inquiries after "that son of yours who went to Australia, you know ;" or that "dear little girl of yours I saw last year ;" when the son is known to be a man who is not likely to prosper in any climate to

which he may transport himself, and the "little girl" has been lying stiff and cold in her coffin for many weary months past?

Such mistakes as these Sophy Herbert never perpetrated, and as (to do her justice) she was a kind-hearted little woman, she would have been a welcome guest to every house she visited were it not for that certain nameless fascination which she employed sometimes, and which made other women nervous about their lovers, in the same way that a hen clucks uneasily when she sees her duckling offspring swim down streams which she may not fathom, but which afflict her with a sense of danger and unhappiness.

While Gerald Lisle sipped his cup of tea out of the little china cup Sophy tendered him, Captain Adair seated himself at the work-table, and with all the familiarity of an intimate acquaintance, began to dislodge and pull out all the scissors, thimbles,

papers, and scraps of every description that he could find. While he is engaged at this interesting occupation, and Mrs. Herbert watches him from under her eyelids (she liked Geoffry to touch all the little things that she herself used in her daily occupations), we will give a few lines to Captain Adair's personal appearance, a point that has hitherto been too much neglected, considering the position he is bound to hold in this story. The little orphan of the Lynn-court portrait had grown very tall indeed since his baby legs had been represented in such pink flesh tints in that miniature. He was now a little under six feet in height, and had only been preserved from ungainliness of appearance by the military drill, which had thrown back the falling shoulders and expanded the broad chest to its fullest extent.

"A fine-looking fellow," men called him, but "plain in the face."

Women did not make the latter objec-

tion, and Geoffry Adair's light curly hair and blue eyes were much admired by those of the fair sex on whom he had bestowed any attention. They generously pardoned the defects that caused men to pronounce Geoffry plain. These defects, which consisted of a forehead too narrow and low, eyes too close together, and lips a little too full and red, were more than counterbalanced in their estimation by the excessive fineness of the light hair that made a rippled edge over the forehead; by the full heavy lids that generally shadowed half the eyes, giving them a somewhat indolent look; by the largeness of the auburn moustache, that concealed the over-fulness of the lips; and, above all, by the pale, clear cut character of his face, which gave him that appearance prized even more by women than actual beauty, namely, that of being "interesting-looking."

As Mrs. Herbert watched the sunbeams glance across the back of his fair well-

shaped head, she felt that she would give a good deal to be able to despise all conventionality and go up and kiss the tips of those glistening curls. Had she done so, Mr. Lisle would hardly have been more scandalized than Geoffry himself, for Mrs. Herbert had not succeeded as yet in establishing any position with Geoffry, more than what might be held by any friend who brought to the aid of friendship the charm of being a young and lovely woman. At present Captain Adair believed himself to be quite as much attached to George Herbert as to his wife.

He had known Sophy before she married, when he was only a boy and she a betrothed bride. He had received great kindness from George Herbert, who himself, being then in the plenitude of his happiness, could afford to compassionate the lonely unfriended young man, who had been sent to study at a private tutor's near the residence of Sophy's father, and who had no other

home in England in which to spend his holiday hours.

The attachment between Sophy and this youth was naturally looked upon as being of the most harmless character, and, as far as Geoffry was concerned, this supposition was a correct one. He was very fond of Sophy. "She was very kind and good to him," he said, "only he couldn't think what the deuce it was made her go off into such tantrums sometimes."

He was seventeen to her twenty, so in most respects she had the advantage of him ; but as a blunt surface will turn the sharpest of arrows, so did her consciousness rebound off his innocence and single-mindedness.

The woman who was about to marry a plain middle-aged man for the sake of wealth and position, might look wistfully at this youth with his shapely curly head, and wonder whether some deeper passion than ambition might not one day blaze up in her heart.

But the lad whose spare hours were all given to the manly sports of riding, cricket, fishing, and shooting, whose foot was like a deer's in the race, and whose seat and nerve on a horse made him even at that early age conspicuous as "being first-rate across country," was not likely to be tenderly affected by the image of a girl whom he had known for so long, and who was already engaged to be Mrs. Herbert of Castle Herbert when Geoffry entered his seventeenth year.

Could anyone have opened the eyes of this young Adonis to the nature of Sophy's feeling towards him, I cannot swear that he would not have laid down his boar spear and paid all homage to the beauty before him; but it never occurred to him to imagine there was any design in the movements that brought Sophy so near to him when they sat under the trees, and she kindly heard him say by rote the lesson he was to repeat to his tutor the next day.

When she crouched by his side in the meadow, where he angled for fish, and finally let her head slip down on his shoulder, it never suggested itself to him that he was expected to kiss the soft cheek put so temptingly near his ; he would, perhaps, entreat her "to keep still a moment, and not move," but that was because he feared to startle away his fish.

On one occasion (it was the night before Sophy's marriage) she went up to him as he stood alone in the dusk of the drawing-room, and for the first time since she had felt this passion grow up in her breast she was a little over-mastered by it.

She put her arms round his neck, and kissed him passionately ; her face was wet with tears, and she looked in his eyes with a yearning tenderness, which, perhaps, it was as well for him the darkness partly concealed.

"Why, Soph, dear, what's the matter?" the lad began.

But the sound of his voice, so kindly in tone, but so unconcerned, restored her at once to self-possession.

"It's very stupid of me, Geoff," she said, "but the thoughts of leaving home, and all—all of you, seems rather to upset me."

"Well, but it isn't as if you were going away to a long distance," Geoffrey said, consolingly. "Your home will always be in England; and you'll have really good hunters now," he added, his eyes brightening at the idea.

"We'll cut them all down next season—eh, Soph?"

"I don't know," she said, gloomily. "Mr. Herbert may not approve of my hunting."

Geoffrey suggested it was impossible that George "could be such a duffer," but Sophy shook her head; and when Geoffrey had retired to dress for dinner, which he did after a cheerful admonition to Sophy not to "be low, and fret herself for no-

thing," that young lady picked up a blue silk handkerchief that had been round Geoffry's neck, and cast it passionately at a marble statue of Apollo that stood in a niche by the fire-place.

"I might as well fling burning coals at *you*," she cried, apostrophising the figure, "as show warmth of heart towards that smooth-faced—fool——!"

It would be impossible to describe the expression she put into this last epithet, as she glared at the statue with a look in her beautiful eyes that was positively savage.

Nevertheless she picked up the handkerchief, and pressed it to her lips and breast before she left the room, and when she went to sleep that night it was twisted round her throat, and the ends of it lay lightly over the heart that should have been dreaming of George Herbert.

## CHAPTER X.

“Dost think old Sylvio, and his wealth of gems,  
Could buy one moment of the keen sweet joy  
That thrilled my heart to-night, when Fabian’s touch  
Sent rose-blooms from my fingers to my cheek?”

A. C. S.

YEARS passed away. Mrs. Herbert visited many a foreign town, and made many new friends, before she met the boy again whose image had stood between her and her husband on their wedding-day.

Sophy had become fond of this husband. She was touched by his tenderness, and won over by his attentions to her comfort and pleasure. She was a selfish woman, and felt grateful to the man who ministered so much to her selfishness. She was of an affectionate disposition, and she loved (after

a fashion) the husband on whose breast her head had been pillowed for ten peaceful years—years that had never been ruffled by anger or sorrow. But, in spite of all this—in spite of her having met with many men quite as good-looking as Geoffry, if not handsomer men, who would willingly have given her all the adoration which had been wanting in him—in spite of her having seen the world, of her mind having become expanded and her manners formed since that evening when she wore the blue handkerchief round her neck—notwithstanding that she had grown into a matron—that he on his part was much altered in appearance,—in spite of all these, and a thousand other good reasons why she should now regard Geoffry Adair with the same kindly indifference which he had once manifested towards her, she could not help feeling all the old fatal attraction steal over her before she had been many hours in his presence, and for some

weeks after Geoffry's re-introduction into the family Mrs. Herbert was fighting a battle in which honour and the duty she owed her husband made but a poor defence against the strength of her own selfish passions.

Geoffry was seventeen when Sophy's marriage separated her from him; he was four and twenty when the Herberts, after a lengthened tour abroad, returned to England, and met him by accident at an evening party in London.

Geoffry was standing by a doorway, looking at the dancing with that gentle air of indifference which is supposed to be the especial prerogative of guardsmen, when he saw a face that for brilliancy surpassed all others near it—a face that reminded him of something or somebody he knew, but which yet was unlike the image it reminded him of.

Presently a turn of the lady's head brought the rather peculiar colour of her

hair and contour of her massive throat well into view.

It flashed upon him then who it was, and, with an energy which much surprised his companions in the doorway, he exclaimed, "Sophy, by Jove!" and pushing his way through the crowd, was soon before the lady in question, shaking her hand with more than conventional warmth, and asking a hundred questions without waiting for an answer, as is the custom among friends when they have been separated a long time, and have not yet re-learnt the art of making their conversation fit into each other's groove of thought.

"Don't you remember me, Soph—Mrs. Herbert?" amended Geoffry, seized with a sudden access of shyness. "Don't you remember Geoffry Adair, to whom you and Herbert were so kind? Where do you come from, how long have you been back, and where are you living now?"

Mrs. Herbert stood looking at him for

an instant, without answering his rapid questioning; then she drew a long breath, and the face that had become dulled by some strong emotion at the first sound of his voice resumed its usual brilliancy of expression.

“Dear old Geoffry,” she said pleasantly, “I am so glad to meet you again! you seem to me to be very little altered since the old days; your moustache has acquired much more importance, though; and altogether you are taller, more manly-looking. Yes—I think you are improved.” She said the last words slowly; she hardly liked to acknowledge that there was any alteration in what she had once thought so perfect.

Geoffry laughed, and drew her arm in his. “Come and have a comfortable talk, Sophy,” he said: “you must have no end of things to tell me about; there’s your children, and Herbert; and do you ride still, Sophy?”

“Did she ride still?” Mrs. Herbert felt

a pang of vexation rise up within her at the question. Did he think her too old now for the accomplishment she had been so pre-eminent in when he first knew her? "Of course I do," she answered, gaily. "Do I look as if I couldn't, Geoff?"

"Oh, no! but I should think we both ride a stone or two heavier now," he answered, glancing down at the increased proportions of the shoulders and bust beneath him.

"You are as fond of hunting as ever, Geoffrey?" she asked, as she sank into a low ottoman, and made him a sign to take a place by her side.

"Indeed I am," he said; "it is about the only thing I do care much about, Sophy."

She looked at him sharply. "Has had a disappointment in love," she said to herself, but another glance at his clear, untroubled eyes reassured her. "No, he is still the same," she muttered; "still the same light

heart and unruffled conscience," and "still the same perfect unconsciousness of my attractions," she was obliged to add, as she perceived that his eyes, instead of resting on her, were wandering round the room in search of Herbert.

When Sophy got home that night, she told her husband of how she had seen Geoffrey Adair, and how the poor dear was so altered she should have hardly known him.

This was one of the delicate touches by which she laid the groundwork of her schemes. She was no vulgar artificer, was Sophy, and she knew, perhaps better than any one, how to say an apparently careless speech, which, coming lightly from her lips, was yet meant to produce a weighty effect on the mind of the person to whom it was addressed.

George Herbert was pleased, he hardly knew why, to hear in Sophy's tone an insinuation that her boyish friend had not

improved in personal appearance, and her familiar epithet of "Poor dear" served to remind him of the former intimacy that had subsisted between Sophy and young Adair.

And so Herbert said exactly what his wife meant him to say, namely, that she must be sure and ask the "poor boy" to dinner; that he was very glad indeed that she had met him again, for he was a "nice fellow—a very nice fellow, indeed."

"Yes," observed Sophy, sweetly; and "do you remember, George, how Geoffry used to envy you your hand on a horse, and how he used to follow your lead to hounds, saying that you were 'the best man out, bar none?'"

"Ah," said Herbert, with a slow smile lighting up his thin face; "did he though? Yes, I think I do remember. He used to go very well, that boy did. We must ask him down to Castle Herbert this winter,

Soph, and mount him well; be sure you ask him to dinner.”

And with these amiable words, the victim to wifely ingenuity left the room, while Sophy instantly sat down to her desk with the intention of dutifully carrying out her husband's wishes, and writing a note of invitation to “Captain Adair, Guards' Club, Pall Mall.”

And so it happened that Geoffry soon became a familiar and privileged visitor in H—— Street. If, during the two years that followed the renewal of his intimacy with Sophy it assumed a warmer nature than he was himself conscious of, it was because she flung her charms round him with so light a hand, that he became entangled in them without knowing why or wherefore. She combined the parts of friend, sister, and flirt with excellent effect, and made herself so agreeable to him in this triple capacity, that she obtained an influence over him superior to that of any

other person. Perhaps she was not willing to risk any decided expression of her real sentiments, fearing lest Geoffry's generous nature should take alarm at the thoughts of doing any wrong to his friend, or that friend's wife, or it might be that she was not prepared to commit herself to anything that might forfeit her position with Herbert, should it be discovered that she had done aught to merit such forfeiture; but, whatever the reason was, it is certain that, up to that summer afternoon in which I have introduced Geoffry Adair, sitting in the drawing-room in H—— Street, Mrs. Herbert had said or done nothing that could lead him to imagine that she regarded him with any feeling but that of the tenderest friendship.

We will now return to the trio we left discussing their afternoon tea in Mrs. Herbert's drawing-room.

"I have been trying to persuade Adair to run down into X——shire for a few

days," said Gerald, who, having tried for some moments in vain to catch a glimpse of himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece (the view being obscured by vases of flowers), thought he might as well plunge into conversation again.

"Captain Adair already knows X——shire very well. X——shire is *my* county," said Mrs. Herbert, carelessly fluttering a feathered screen before her eyes.

"Ah, but he doesn't know our side of the county," said Gerald, eagerly. "Castle Herbert is at least ten miles away from Lynncourt and Gardenhurst."

"And why do you want him to go down there?" asked Mrs. Herbert, curiously.

"Oh! only because I want him to know my people. My father is one of the pleasantest fellows in the world when he likes to be so; and as for my mother and sisters——"

"Oh, you have sisters!"

Sophy said this with a sharpness uncom-

mon to her soft, low voice, and glanced furtively at Geoffry, while she put other questions to his friend :

“ Of what age are your sisters, Mr. Lisle ? and are they pretty ? ”

Sophy looked at Gerald spitefully as she spoke, thinking it not impossible that his sisters might be pretty ; his was just the sort of baby-face that might be lovely in a woman, although it was insignificant in a man.

“ Ya—as ; I rather think they are,” said Gerald, softly pulling his moustache, with an air of conceit that made Sophy feel as though she would like to box his ears. “ But they are mere children — children, both of them,” Gerald added.

He wasn't altogether a fool, this baby-faced young man—no Lisle was. In some things he was almost as shrewd as a woman, and he already knew this much more than Geoffry did, namely, that Mrs. Herbert would not allow the latter to go to Gar-

denhurst if she thought he was likely to meet young and attractive women there.

"Really," said Sophy, sweetly, in answer to Gerald's last remark. "Then, if Captain Adair accepts your invitation, I hope you will allow me to send down a few *bonbons* and French toys to your little sisters. I am so fond of children (Oh, Mrs. Herbert!), that I have constant importations from Paris of all the latest inventions in wax dolls."

Gerald laughed. He could not help it. The idea of Esty as associated with wax dolls was too much for his equanimity. But the laugh was a mistake, for Mrs. Herbert heard it, and detected its motive immediately.

"You mean they are too young! But perhaps they have always lived in the country, and that keeps children rather backward—don't you think so?"

This was a "back-hander," delivered at her possible rivals, and at the same time it was calculated to draw Gerald out.

"Backward," he echoed, indignantly. "I tell you what it is, Mrs. Herbert, there are very few women who, to all the freshness of youth (Mrs. Herbert winced, though very slightly), can bring such attractions to bear as my sister Esty can boast of. She is the cleverest girl I ever met, and the most accomplished. She can sing like a nightingale, and plays as well as she sings. She speaks French and Italian like a native——"

"Of X——shire?" interrupted Sophy, interrogatively, with a smile on her face to conceal the impertinence.

"Like a native of Paris and Florence," said Gerald, coolly. His blood was up, and he did not choose that *his* sister should be spoken of in a derogatory tone by any woman, however great his wish to please her.

"Quite an infant phenomenon," suggested Mrs. Herbert, pretending to repress a yawn.

"A phenomenon, certainly, but not an

infant," said Gerald. "Esty must be at least—let me see—well, about seventeen."

And then Mr. Lisle made his bow and departed, having first made an appointment with Geoffry to meet him the next morning at Tattersall's to see a horse. He did not wish to prolong the encounter of wits with Mrs. Herbert, for he felt that he was already worsted. True, he had departed with the privilege, unusual for a man, of having had the last word; but then he suffered under that which Scrub declares to be much worse than telling a lie, namely, the consciousness of being "found out."

Sophy had found him out, and he quite understood that it was now very improbable that Geoffry should visit Gardenhurst yet awhile.

As soon as the door had closed behind Mr. Lisle, Sophy glided up to the back of Geoffry's chair.

"What are you thinking of, boy?" she

said, softly. Mrs. Herbert frequently used a maternal manner and form of address towards Geoffry. It gave her excuses for touching his curls, putting her hand on his shoulder, and a thousand other of those little familiarities that seem to give inexpressible pleasure to women who love.

Geoffry looked up and patted her hand kindly.

"I was thinking of my father," he said, in rather a sad tone.

"And what made you think of him?"

With that quick tact that distinguished her, Sophy had already altered the inflexion of her voice to suit the tone of his.

"Lisle mentioned Lynncourt just now, and that reminded me of Lady Renshawe. She was a great friend of my father's; he often used to talk about her, and say he hoped I should know her. She must be a very old woman now," said the young man, meditatively poking back with his cane a

flower that threatened to tumble from its vase.

“What relation was she to your father?” asked Mrs. Herbert.

“Oh, none! only a great friend of his. Sophy,” he continued, “do you know, I think I should have been a much better man if my father had lived.”

“Why so?”

“Because he died when I was too young to receive any bias from his influence. I’ve had no one to love me [here Sophy gave him a look which he did not see]; no one to direct my studies, tastes, or pursuits; I was left to drift along the world as best I could at the time when I most wanted a pilot.”

“There is your stepmother, and Amelia,” suggested Mrs. Herbert.

“My stepmother and Amelia,” echoed the young man, scornfully. “How can I have anything in common with a big wax doll and its baby duplicate?”

"And there's Alfred."

"Alfred is a sneak!"

Alfred Cadogan was the name of Mrs. Adair's son by her first husband.

"I never see Alfred enter a room without comparing his movements to those of a sinuous black snake. I'm thankful that his continued residence abroad obviates the necessity of my being brought much in contact with him."

"He is a commercial genius, is he not?" asked Sophy, with a slight yawn, which she concealed by bending her face, until her lips swept the flossy fringe of Captain Adair's short curls.

"He is a great speculator, and a successful one," answered Geoffry, gravely. "It was said that his father, Cadogan, was of Greek origin; that he was beautiful in face, and treacherous of nature. He was a well-known member of the Stock Exchange, and when he died all the rumours which his wealth and daring audacity had enabled

him to live down in the course of his prosperous career broke out afresh. Men at his death shook their heads when they spoke of Xerxes Cadogan—the sharp practitioner,’ they called him ; ‘ a knowing hand ; rather too knowing, perhaps.’ ”

“ Where did General Adair meet with Mrs. Cadogan ? ”

“ After her husband’s death she went to Italy, being afflicted with anxiety as to the state of health of her blue-eyed Amelia. [Amelia, by the way, was and is a thorough Saxon in appearance, and takes after her mother.] She gave her ‘ dear Alfred,’ as she called him, the option of staying at Eton, where his father had placed him, or of accompanying her.”

“ Of course he went with her ? ” suggested Sophy.

“ On the contrary, the sagacious youth preferred to stay where he was ; he was only fourteen at the time, but he reasoned like a man of sixty. ‘ I was sent here by

my father,' he said, 'in order that I might form good connections. These I have to a certain extent already made, and I hope that in my future life I may find them useful to me. I mean to follow in my honoured father's footsteps by adopting his profession.' "

" 'You do?' said my stepmother, opening her blue eyes in astonishment at this early display of decision on her pampered favourite's part.

" 'Yes, dear mamma, I do indeed. There is nothing I should so much wish as to be rich, and to be feared, as he was; and with this intention of emulating him, the first thing I must adopt is his advice, which I am sure must be good, for it was born of successful experience.' "

" 'Fancy a child of that age talking in that strain,' interrupted Sophy; "it makes one long to box his ears."

" 'Aye, doesn't it?' said Geoffry, energetically; "and I did it afterwards," he added, with a pleased smile passing over

his face at the remembrance, "but that was about something else."

Then he went on :

" 'And what was your dear father's advice?' asked my stepmother.

" 'That I should never lose anything once obtained, but spend my days in acquiring fresh gains ; that I should live as much as possible in England, for that, while all the world over I should find an equal proportion of fools whom I might hope to dupe, nowhere should I find so much money for fools to waste as in this country. You start, my son,' he said, 'with advantages I never possessed. You have name, station, and a certain amount of capital ; I had nothing but my genius and my handsome face. The former was useful with the men, the latter was invaluable with the women. (My stepmother must have winced at the suggestive remembrances called forth by this latter part of the departed Xerxes' counsel.) You, my son, have an ugly face, but I hope

and believe you have talent. Your want of beauty will enhance your success with the men; besides, a man in business who is ugly and grave obtains a double share of confidence—he is introduced sooner to the Lares and Penates of the Englishman's household.

“‘Indeed! And what more did your father tell you?’ demanded Mrs. Cadogan.

“‘I have got it all written here,’ said the wise boy, producing a note-book. ‘I have taken down all my father’s axioms from time to time, as I was afraid I might forget them, and he always told me I should never get anyone to give me such good advice as he could.’

“‘And what more does he say?’

“‘He says, with regard to women, he will not presume to lay down any laws for my guidance, as the sharpest men have been subject to the wildest delusion about this branch of the creation; but he assures me that the woman does not exist who may not

be won by perseverance and audacity, the former being to the full as valuable an ingredient in a man's success as the latter. He further recommends me to select the richest and best-looking heiress of my acquaintance, and marry her. He did so, and he found it answer. If he gets tired of her he will not get tired of her money,' pursued Master Alfred, consulting his notebook. 'And then father ends by saying, Speculation, my son, is a beautiful and interesting occupation. The man who speculates, like a Chinese juggler, spends his days in tossing up and catching golden balls — balls from which, like the wily Asiatic, he must never remove his gaze; but he should remember, if possible, always to play this dazzling game with his neighbours' tools, at least until he has acquired sufficient dexterity to be quite sure of making no mistake in his play.'"

"And what did your stepmother say to all this?" asked Mrs. Herbert, curiously.

"She said," answered Geoffry, laughing, "My dear boy, follow your own devices. I feel quite assured that I can give you no counsel or protection but what would be utterly superfluous. I will leave you at Eton for the present. If you have need of more pocket-money, write to me at the post-office, Lucca, in Tuscany.' "

" 'Mother,' said her son bowing, 'I am glad you acquiesce in my decision. As to pocket-money, I shall not exceed my allowance, but I think it might be as well, perhaps, if I spent my holidays with you. I may find it useful to acquire the language.' "

"Then it was at Lucca Mrs. Cadogan met your father?" asked Sophy, interrogatively.

"They met at Florence," said Geoffry, with a cloud passing over his forehead. "My own mother had been dead about two years, and I believe it was more a notion of supplying her place to me,

than any idea that it would conduce to his own happiness, that induced my father to marry the round-faced widow of Xerxes Cadogan. She was not a bad-hearted woman, and if my father had only been as intensely commonplace as herself, they might have been tolerably happy. As it was, their life was one continual jar, and I believe the only comfortable moment he knew during his married life, was that in which the time came for him to say good-bye to us all. I remember it as if it were yesterday," the young man said, with emotion. "I can fancy now I hear the chesnuts falling, and the brawl of the Serchio, as it rushed down the valley, beneath our windows. My father's hands were folded in prayer, until the sun fell behind the mountain; then he became a little revived by the evening air, and called for me.

"He, too, gave me some advice, but it was of a very different character to that given to my stepbrother by Xerxes Cadogan.

“He said, ‘Geoffry, are you there?’ I said, ‘Yes, father, I am holding your hand.’ I had been crying all the afternoon, for as I sat there listening to the river, and looking at the chesnut-wooded hills, it seemed so hard to think that he might never walk up those hills again—never follow the winding of the stream with me—never shoot, fish, ride, or box with me any more. He heard me sob, and he grasped my hand a little tighter. ‘Don’t, my son,’ he said; ‘I am not afraid to die—like Collingwood, I am content with the memory of my past life—it is only you I am troubled about.’ Then he paused for breath, and my sense of hearing, which had been strained to catch his low-spoken words, again fell attuned to the rush of the waters and the rustle of the leaves. Presently he spoke again. ‘Be good, my son,’ he said; ‘do your duty to God and man—be brave in all ways—physically, because you are a soldier by inheritance, and because you would not

wish the memory of your father's naked sword and hard-won medals to be contrasted with a full scabbard and an unadorned breast, but be brave in being good—that's the hardest—and, above all, it's most hard for a young man who has to fight with the devil single-handed, with no father to back the right—but be good, Geoff, and remember that you had a father who was proud to live, and not afraid to die.' ”

“ It wasn't much,” said Captain Adair, passing his hand over his eyes, “ it wasn't much he said, you see, Sophy—he was ever a man of few words—but I hope I shall never forget those words. For ten years they have served me in the place of father, mother, or brother !”

“ Was Mrs. Cadogan, that is Mrs. Adair, kind to you ?” asked Mrs. Herbert, her eyes devouring Geoffry with a degree of tenderness in their brown depths which made them look as if they were melting into her eyelashes.

“Not otherwise. She meant to be kind, but she was as fussy and conventional among the hills of Tuscany as if she had been living in Berkeley Square, and she was at constant war, not so much with my morals as with my manners: it horrified her to see me with sunburnt face and hands shaking down the chestnuts, scrambling up the hills in company with the donkey-boys, or fording the river with my linen trowsers rolled up round my knees. One evening I was having a chase after Pietro, the farrier's son, he had cheeked me, and I pursued him to punish him; he had scrambled from ledge to ledge with the agility of a monkey, and every time I stopped I saw his little brown legs dangling just above my reach, and his dark eyes glowing like coals, as he peeped through the branches, crying, ‘Oh, little Englishman, Mother of Christ! but you are slow.’ At last he took to the river, and I followed him, laughing and holloaing as my bare feet slipped over the broken bits

of rock, and splashed through the foam that eddied round them. Just as I had caught little black eyes, and was magnanimously contenting myself with ducking his head by way of revenge, I heard a rustle of silks by the water's edge, and there stood my stepmother, shaking her parasol at me, looking like an agitated hen in a cackle of impotent wrath.

“‘Come out, Geoffry, you naughty boy. Oh, what a trial he is to me! Your brother has just arrived from England; come out, directly, and say ‘how-d’ye-do’ to him, and pray, my dear boy (this was said soothingly), do come in and make yourself look more like a gentleman before Alfred sees you.’

“But it was too late, for already Alfred was seen descending, with careful, diminutive steps, the declivity that led down to the stream from our side of the house. I watched the little man with the greatest interest, not unmixed with curiosity: it

was as though a strange animal were visiting our wilds.

“Master Cadogan walked with deliberation beyond his age, he seemed much disturbed by the uneven nature of the ground he had to descend, and he extended his hand to obtain the support of every bough that overshadowed his path. He was clad in the latest stage of Eton fashion : his hat was diminutive, but his shirt-collars were portentous ; he wore a frock coat, made of glossy black cloth, and a waistcoat to match ; across the latter extended the heavy links of a handsome gold chain ; he had on the tiniest of patent boots, and he held in one hand a small gold-mounted cane.

“‘Something like a gentleman,’ his mother said, proudly, as she watched him coming down the slope. ‘Come out and shake hands with your brother, Geoffry.’

“‘Ho ! that’s my brother, is it ?’ said I ; and then I’m afraid I was rather rude, for

I put my hands on my knees, and laughed. 'Let him come in and shake hands with me, if he's anxious about it,' I said.

"'For shame, Geoffry; here is General Carteret, too, an old friend of your father's! he has kindly brought Alfred with him from Florence.'

"I looked up and saw that behind Master Cadogan came the figure of a tall, soldier-like looking man, whose grizzly moustache and military bearing brought a pang to my heart: 'A friend of your father's,' too. I was out of the water in an instant, Sophy, and pulling off my straw-hat, with a grave bow to the Etonian who had evidently thought to overawe me by the formality of his address, I advanced to General Carteret, and clasped his hand warmly.

"'I am very glad to see you, sir,' I said; 'all who loved my father must be welcome to my mother, and his son.'

"Mrs. Adair looked extremely astonished

and a little pleased. Her black-eyed boy glanced slant-wise at me with an expression in which contempt had given place to surprise ; while the General returned my greeting most cordially. ‘ I knew Jasper Adair’s son would be a gentleman,’ he remarked in an undertone to my step-mother, and she bit her lips and proposed an adjournment to the house.

“ The fact was, Sophy, I was determined to show them that my father’s son and constant companion could exhibit as much courtesy of manner as though he had lived all his life in the most fashionable school in England, and that however much spurious politeness my step-brother had learnt to assume by associating with a large community of youths who affected good manners as ‘ a style,’ it wasn’t likely that he could surpass in refinement or innate good-breeding a boy who had spent all his days with a man so intellectual and gentle as my father. We spent a formal but rather

pleasant evening. Amelia was perched up on a high chair, and her chubby white shoulders and fair curls shone resplendent from their contrast with her black dress. I had watched the greeting between the brother and sister curiously; I pictured to myself how, if I had a sister, I should rush up and kiss her and ask after a thousand old pleasures of our play-hours; how I should love, torment, and caress her.

“But Alfred’s notion of fraternal affection was evidently very different from mine.

“‘Here is your sister Amelia,’ my step-mother announced, when that young lady sidled into the room. ‘Aw-oh!’ said Alfred, with a conceited intonation in his voice, that made me long to kick him; and he got up, and just touching his sister’s cheek, observed languidly that she was ‘really grown;’ and then subsided again into the rocking chair by the window.

“Alfred was nearly two years older than I, but he was much slighter in frame, much

more supple of movement, whenever he did condescend to move. After dinner we retired outside, and began to stroll down the high road leading towards Lucca.

“‘This is a dreadful place!’ remarked Alfred, shivering. ‘Are there none but brick floors here, and do they never put carpets down?’

“‘I looked at him, and saw that his thin pinched lips were blue with cold. ‘Let’s have a run,’ I suggested, cheerfully, ‘up that hill; that will warm you.’

“‘The Etonian shuddered: ‘I never run,’ he said.

“‘Do you box or fence?’

“‘I never box. I can fence a little.’

“‘Then he turned round on me, ‘I suppose you haven’t learnt to ride in this beastly country?’

“‘Can’t I?’ I answered, with a chuckle. ‘If you go up to Rome with us this year, I’ll show you some timber in the Campagna that’s well worth riding at.’

"Again my brother shook his close-cropped, shiny black head. 'I never ride at timber,' he said, and then he relapsed into silence, and I began to wish that I might rejoin my little monkey-faced Pietro, who, I decided, was worth twenty of this sleek, solemn muff."

"How did it all end?" asked Sophy, sweetly.

"Well, things went on pretty smoothly," said Geoffry, flushing at the remembrance, "and then——"

"Well, and then?"

"There was a very pretty little girl, called Carolina, Pietro's sister; a girl of about fifteen; a girl so pretty and so typical of her country that I never think of Tuscany without remembering her bright face, shadowed by her red handkerchief as she lounged at her doorway in the evening, her large dark eyes flashing with mirth and mischief, and every movement filled with a lithesome grace peculiar to the natives of

her country. My admiration was harmless enough, as you may suppose, Sophy ; I thought her a jolly little girl, and I delighted in trying to make sketches of the landscape, with Carolina's hair, and Carolina's eyes enlarged to an unnatural and impossible size, in the foreground. But, Alfred, you know, was two years older than I."

"Well?"

"Well, one day" (the young man blundered over the rest of his story, like a horse stumbling over broken ground), "Alfred, finding Carolina alone at her door when the men had gone to the chestnut beating, fixed his eye-glass in his long eye, and called out imperiously, 'Vieni qui, Bellina.'

"The girl stared at him, and made no reply, only tumbling over and round her arms a pet kitten, of which she was fond.

"Alfred put down her silence to her not understanding his invitation, and approached her familiarly, and put his arm

round her waist. At that moment the kitten pounced on his bare hand, thinking, no doubt, from the abruptness with which it had been placed in its position, that it was put there on purpose for it to play with; the sharp hook of its claw drew a long blue streak down Master Alfred's hand, and, angry at the pain, he grasped the kitten by the throat, and threw it with all his force against the opposite wall, where it fell dead.

"It was at this moment that I came up, and Carolina in a passion of rage and tears threw herself over to where the kitten lay, invoking the vengeance of all the saints, headed by the Virgin Mary, on the ugly, ever-to-be-despised little Englishman who had murdered her dearly-loved cat.

"Fired with indignation, both on Carolina's account and that of the kitten, I pulled off my linen jacket, and invited Alfred to 'Come on.'

"He took no notice of my proffered

courtesy, but attempted to pass out of the house, whereupon I gave my step-brother a vigorous thrashing."

"I dare say it did him good," remarked Mrs. Herbert, piously.

"I doubt it," said Captain Adair. "I don't think *anything* would."

Mrs. Herbert laughed at the hopelessness of his tone.

"Where is he now?" she asked.

"At Munich, I believe. He has long since embarked on the career marked out for him by his father. He is already noted for his abilities among the money-shifters of the day. Whether he will ever emulate his father's daring or his 'sharp dealing' remains to be proved. I should fancy he is too cautious ever to be a great speculator."

"And your stepmother and Amelia?"

"They are at present in Paris, but they expect to be in England next month. And now, Sophy, I will take my leave. I fear I have wearied you as it is."

Mrs. Herbert glanced kindly at him from under the deep fringe of her eyelashes. "You never weary me," she said; "but tell me, Geoffry, what is the tie between this old Lady Renshawe and you? Why should you wish to go and see her?"

"Only that my father used to speak very warmly of her. It seems she was a dear friend of my mother's. They used to correspond with each other until my mother's death, and then the connection dropped; but my father often told me that, if ever I wanted a friend in England, he was sure I should find one in Lady Renshawe."

"You do not want for friends, Geoffry, while you have me—*us*," said Mrs. Herbert, correcting herself.

Geoffry smiled a pleasant smile, that showed all the lights in his blue eyes.

"I know I do not," he said; "but I should like to go and see the old countess soon. I should have done so long before

this, only that I did not like to obtrude myself on her privacy; now that her nephew has asked me, I have a good opportunity of making her acquaintance."

"At any rate, don't go yet," pleaded Sophy, earnestly. "I am so much alone in session time that it is a real charity to come and see me. Besides," she added, rapidly, "Herbert depends on you to assist us in our summer purchases at Tattersall's. We've got to make up our stud for next winter, you know, and—and there's no one to take me about. At least, Geoffry, promise me that you will keep the next month clear of any engagement to go to Lynncourt."

Seeing that he still hesitated, Mrs. Herbert snapped the rose in her waistband petulantly, and flung the decapitated head out of the window.

"I did not think you could be so unkind, Geoffry, as to prefer a stupid old woman to me. Since you won't do anything to oblige

Herbert or myself, I suppose you must go. But you might have delayed your visit a month."

"Well, Sophy, since you really wish it," said Geoffry, puzzled by her vehemence, "and if I really can be of any use to you in town——"

"Yes!" she said eagerly, and she placed her hand on his shoulder.

"I won't go until July," he answered; and, unconscious of her touch, he walked to the window whistling a little soft Italian air.

## CHAPTER XI.

"A most acute juvenal; voluble and free of grace."

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST.

THE month Mrs. Herbert had petitioned for came and went, and still Captain Adair lingered in town, finding it almost impossible to extricate himself from the many engagements the Herberts involved him in from day to day, without seeming positively rude and ungrateful to friends to whom he owed so much. At least this was the light in which Sophy continued to make every endeavour on his part to go away from town during the season appear to him.

It might seem singular that Mrs. Herbert should fear for Geoffry a week's seclusion in the country with women of whose attrac-

tions she was not assured, rather than the constant opportunities he had in London of meeting again and again some of its fairest and most attractive denizens, but Sophy had gauged her favourite's character pretty correctly, when she said :

“He is a romantic fool, and he is young. Love with him will have to be nursed by sentiment, and his first passion will be as fresh and pure as the early morning. Did he love only for love's sake he would have loved *me* ere this ; but, no ! at his age he scorns the attractions of well-dressed women and perfect manners ; he thinks they are so many milliners' dolls, and sighs for the ethereal charms of some ‘Egeria of his soul ;’ some floating vision who is independent of Parisian stays and Isidore's *coiffeur*. It is only the middle-aged men, who appreciate the luxury of our faultless gloves and infinitesimal boots. Boys of his age,” concluded Sophy, vehemently, “are either angels, puppies, or

brutes: they haven't learnt how to mix their various phases of character in one agreeable whole, and so they are insupportable."

Nevertheless Mrs. Herbert contrived to waste a good deal of thought on one of the tribe she anathematized. And if Geoffry continued to be too much of an angel to please her, it certainly was not her fault.

It must be remarked, that when Mrs. Herbert made the above remarks, she made them in the strictest confidence to herself. Indeed, she rarely confided in any one else. She was a woman to whom many poured out their most secret thoughts, being lulled into security by the soft, quiet, sweet manner with which Mrs. Herbert soothed doubt and encouraged timidity; but she never reciprocated her friend's confidence by communicating any of her own weaknesses to them.

"Tell all your secrets into Chloe's ear,  
But none of Chloe's shall you ever hear!"

Like the suspicious king, who never slept without his shirt of mail, Sophy was never off her guard. "All men are weak," she reasoned; "all women treacherous. Tell your secret to Samson, and the next evening he spends with Delilah she will acquire it, as he reveals all his thoughts under the influence of the inevitable hair-cutting; tell the same to Delilah herself, and you simplify the matter, but the result is none the more pleasant when you suddenly find yourself brought up for judgment before the High Court of Philistines."

So Mrs. Herbert let her thoughts grow in silence; and her thoughts were none the purer or better for being cultivated in the dark corners of her mind, away from the sunshine of human observation.

But in her irritation at Geoffrey's want of sensibility to her own fascinations, Mrs. Herbert had permitted her vanity to mislead her a little in the judgment she had formed of his character.

Geoffry was by no means an angel. What high-couraged, warm-hearted young man of four-and-twenty ever was entirely ethereal in his aspirations? But in his very faults he was generous; in his very vices he was essentially manly. It would never occur to his broad, open nature, to deliberately mark down a woman as an object of conquest, or to regard his friend's wife as a more refined species of *lorette* to serve as an instrument of his own pleasure, and that friend's dishonour.

"I like to talk to that Adair," said a celebrated sylphide of the —— Theatre, whose charms were generally considered to be superior to her refinement; "he makes me feel as if I were a duchess."

"I like that young man, Adair," said the old Countess of Stonehenge, who lived in her antiquated mansion in Cavendish Square, but whose parties still comprised (as, indeed, they had done for upwards of half a century) all that was best of London society.

“ I like that young man ; he is one of the few of his class that know now-a-days how to treat a lady. More shame for us ! ”

And so it happened that Geoffry’s instinctive delicacy of mind, which showed itself in chivalrous courtesy to women, made him as great a favourite with the fair sex as his pluck and straightforwardness did with men. Gerald Lisle, indeed, who piqued himself upon the amount of classics he had *smattered* into his mind, if I may use the expression, during his public-school life, was wont to declare supremely that “ Adair was a good fellow, but there was nothing in him—nothing ! ”

But Gerald was one of those people who, failing knowledge of a subject, are content to judge from their ignorance of it.

Geoffry was a somewhat reserved man, and was as chary of displaying his inmost thoughts to mere acquaintances as he was of discussing women’s names in public.

He would play cricket, ride, fence, or box, against any member of the Household Brigade who cared to compete with him ; but, as for seeking any sympathy from these juvenile warriors for the more intellectual phases of his character, he would as soon have thought of asking a Chinese to admire big feet, or of discussing with Alexander, the coppersmith, the claims to immortality of Alexander the Great.

Without being a genius, Geoffry was much, as far as literary attainments went, in advance of most men of his own age and position. The late General Adair had taught his little son other accomplishments besides those purely physical ones in which every Englishman desires his boys to excel. He had grounded him well in Latin and Greek, and he had added so much interest to the beauty of the country in which Geoffry's young days were passed by relations of the beautiful romances with which almost every broken column in Italy is asso-

ciated, that he had planted poetry, as it were, in the boy's very heart. When Geoffry was sent over to England to complete his education for the army, he nearly burst into tears of rage and vexation at his first view of London. "It is ugly; it is black; it is detestable!" he said. And he was only comforted when he was promised that he might, if he liked, return to Florence to see his stepmother on the first favourable opportunity.

"I don't care about my stepmother," he said, candidly; "but I feel stifled in this yellow fog, and I hate these ugly square houses."

He was rather comforted when he reached the country residence occupied by the private tutor who was to "coach" him in his studies. There was a river that flashed by this gentleman's house, and therein were fish to be caught; there were dogs in the kennels for those youths who were wealthy and skilful enough to choose

shooting as an amusement ; and, above all, there was stable room for the two hunters with which Mrs. Adair's liberality had provided her step-son.

One winter's season in England did much to banish Geoffry's regret for the land of sun and flowers. Association with his father had taught his eye to appreciate grace, and his mind to recognise beauty of form and colour, whether it existed in art or nature ; consequently, the cool, grey primness of an English life seemed at first intolerable to this youth, accustomed to revel in all the easy luxury of a southern climate ; to sit down every day to dinner in a dress-coat and starched shirt, and to be served afterwards with an orange, placed formally in his plate, accompanied by a small portion of dry fruit, was very irksome to Geoffry ; and he sighed as he thought of bygone summers abroad, when, with his linen trousers rolled up to his knees, he would stick his bare legs into the river,

and, as it played and splashed over his feet, pull a basket of black juicy figs towards him, and tumble out half of the luscious freight into his own lap, the rest into Pietro's little brown hands.

"It was very jolly there. These English don't know how to manage a hot day!" he ejaculated, mentally, when his host sat down one burning July evening to a dinner of hot roast meat and steaming pudding.

"Oh for a bare skin and a *granita*!" groaned Geoffry, his thoughts taking a backward flight to Naples.

Still, the winter months in England brought enjoyments to the lad which soon caused the memory of Italy, with her vivid skies and smooth seas—her purple vines and crumbling palaces—to pale in his imagination. Day by day the brilliant panorama, which had delighted his childish days, faded from his mind, until it only lived there like some beautiful picture

dimly seen through the broken phases of a pleasant dream. After all, was he not a thorough islander at heart, and did he not rejoice in the hard blows he received and gave at football—the sharp raps that taught him caution with the single-stick—the keen practice with the oars he gained on that reach of the river that swept by his tutor's house?

There were nine other pupils who shared with Geoffry the advantages of the Rev. Mr. Clutterbuck's tuition—well-born, well-bred youths, all of them; and a boy thrown on his own resources so early in life as was Geoffry Adair could hardly have been placed better than in their companionship, and under the control of so cultivated and kind-hearted a gentleman as their master.

Geoffry did no discredit to his father's training of his mental qualities; and Mr. Clutterbuck was as much surprised as pleased to find that his new pupil could hold

his own as well in Latin verse and Greek iambics as with the bat and gloves. But it must be owned that the boy's attention to his studies relaxed a good deal during his first winter season in England. It was in the month of November that the charms of an English landscape first became patent to Geoffry's eyes. At such a time, what could be more beautiful than those low, blurred lines of bare hedges that crossed and re-crossed the brown lands of O——shire, as far as eye could see, until they faded into indistinctness in the blue haze that shrouded the edge of the horizon ! Those wide ditches, with rich earthy scents rising from their black depths of water and dead leaves ; those woodland coverts, with bright patches of red coats dappling in and out the misty shadows ; the sudden lights made through grey-hued switches by glossy-coated horses that champed their bits impatiently, or tore at the nut-boughs, to take compensation in a quiet nibble for their

enforced inaction; and then how instinct with life the whole covert seemed as the hounds swarmed through its tangled labyrinth, their dewy eyes so full of eagerness, and the whole of their well-knit forms, from their keen, intent noses to their waving sterns, quivering with anxiety as they flitted with quick, restless movement from clump to clump!

It was on a soft autumnal morning that Geoffry first made his *début* in the hunting world of O——shire.

Two other pupils had received Mr. Clutterbuck's permission to accompany young Adair on this occasion; and these two youths, both fair riders and both well-mounted, watched, with no little interest and curiosity, to see how "the Italian," as they nicknamed Geoffry, would acquit himself on this his first introduction to a day's hunting in his native country.

As the three rode to covert, accompanied by an experienced groom who had been

sent by the tutor to keep some check over the convoy, many were the speculations indulged in by Bentham and Colburn, Geoffry's companions, as to the probable result of the day's sport as far as they were concerned.

"Hope Nora will take me steadily at her fences; sometimes (when she's fresh) she rushes like a Bedlamite, and makes me feel beastly nervous;" candidly avowed Bentham, who was a boy of a lethargic disposition and hated being hurried at anything.

Colburn on the other hand was a nervous lad, who had just courage enough to let his horse "go," provided that it *did* go without any reference to its rider.

"I like to know nothing about it until it's all over," he remarked, with a slight shiver; "and when Little John refuses I feel as if I should have a fit."

Geoffry meantime contented himself with communicating his secret sentiments to his horse.

"I don't know much about you, old boy," he said, as he swung his leg across his last-arrived hunter, a fine Irish horse, which he had christened "Orangeman," both out of compliment to its colour (a golden chestnut), and to its country. "I don't know much about you, but you've got to carry me to the 'fore to-day, somehow."

And then he joined his friends, and took a roguish pleasure in simulating such an amount of ignorance of horsemanship as made them first ridicule, and then commiserate him.

Colburn almost forgot his own sufferings in the wonderment with which Geoffry's loose seat and uneven handling filled him.

"By Jove! Bentham, *L'Italiano è Sartoio*, a tailor, by Jove! fresh from Moses, and as green as the owner of the spectacles. Whatever could have induced the governor to put him on such a fine quad? He'll fall off at his first fence—he will, indeed."

Bentham remarked, sententiously : " See what comes of bringing up a fellow on the Continent, where riding is still an early art ; I say, Edwards ! "

Edwards who was the groom, moved his horse up alongside that of Mr. Bentham's at the latter's summons.

" Yes, sir. "

" You'll have to pick up the pieces there presently, " indicating with his whip Geoffry, who was a few yards in advance, and who looked at every step his horse took as if he were suffering dislocation of the limbs. " Pray, keep an eye on him, " pleaded Bentham, earnestly. " It would be a dreadful thing if there were any accident ; it might spoil my nerve for life. "

" All right, sir ; I'll take good care on him. " And the groom fell back with a smile on his grim face, for he knew Geoffry's capabilities much better than did these youths who were new arrivals at Mr. Clutterbuck's.

“Don’t you think we’d better give him a word of advice?” suggested Colburn.

“Well! what kind of advice can you give a fellow like that?” said Bentham, despairingly, as Geoffry’s horse gave a slight swerve, and Geoffry, ere recovering his balance in an apparent access of alarm, flung himself on Orangeman’s neck; “excepting to go home; and any fellow who rides like *that*, and who’s been mad enough to come out, isn’t likely to follow such good advice.”

The meet was at a place called Oaklands, but a short distance from home. By this time Edwards and his charges were drawing near the scene of action, and the two commiserators of Geoffry’s incapability became too much self-absorbed to think more about him. Horseman after horseman clattered by the party, and signs of increasing excitement over the country’s face warned the lads that the day’s work would shortly begin.

Colburn became very pale, and his lips compressed, but he held up his head and rode proudly on like a young martyr as he was.

Bentham, on the other hand, wore a sullen expression, and settled his somewhat square person down on to his saddle with determined *aplomb*; he took up his reins with a heavy grasp, and clenched his whip fiercely; but with all this display of determination his heart was nearly as heavy as the less spiritual portions of his frame.

"She's just as likely to rush and knock over the master as not, if she has a chance," was his dismal reflection, as Nora, tickled with some secret delight, squeaked and lashed out behind at poor Little John, who was trotting along with a stolid indifference to all the excitement surrounding him.

When I have said that Bentham and Colburn were "fair riders," I should have perhaps qualified the expression with the word "average."

They *were* fair average riders for lads

of sixteen or thereabouts, they could sit very well on a quiet horse, and if they had a good lead they could follow their leader creditably over any ordinary sized country ; but as for assuming any direct control over their horses or their mode of going, that was quite beyond either their powers or experience. With Geoffry it was different. General Adair, who had been a Leicestershire "crack" in his youth, had spared neither time nor money to render his boy an accomplished horseman ; from the age of seven to that of fourteen Geoffry had been kept in constant practice by being mounted on almost every variety of the equine race that entered his father's stables. One day he would be luxuriating in the sea-wave kind of flow of an Arab's canter ; on another he was taught to submit with a smiling face, but with inward anguish, to the rough tumbrel-like trot of a Normandy cob ; or, mounted on a well-bred English hunter, he was exercised over every variety

of artificial fence—his father having erected a series of these in the large space of ground he occupied by the gardens of their Roman villa.

Here were “ditches to you and ditches from you,” “doubles” to fly and doubles to leap in and out, where the horse was expected to emulate the agility and neat-footedness of a cat. There were banks to crawl, and banks to top with a quick parting kick to aid the impetus over the off-side ditch. One thing General Adair strongly impressed on his little son’s mind, and that was the necessity of being modest with regard to this particular accomplishment.

“The more you think you know, the more you’ll have to learn,” he said; “and remember, in any difficulty you may always sooner trust your horse than he can trust you.”

And thus it was that, thanks to the careful training he had received to aid his natural advantages, Geoffry Adair started

for his first day with the hounds in England under far more promising auspices than any other youth of his age out that day.

The only thing he felt anxious about was Orangeman's temper. The horse had been purchased for Geoffry by Mr. Clutterbuck of a London dealer, a few weeks previously;—ninety guineas had been the price paid by the master on his pupil's behalf. "Rather a large sum to give for a boy's mount," you will say, but then Mrs. Adair had ordered that want of money should be no obstacle to any of Geoffry's pursuits, whether studies or pleasures. It may be that Geoffry's stepmother wished to cast off as much as possible in the world's eye the odium that had attached to her when it was discovered that General Adair had left nearly all his fortune to his surviving widow, including even that which he had derived from Geoffry's mother, and which ought, properly speaking, to have been secured to Geoffry himself.

General Adair's first marriage was a "love match"—a match contracted in haste and secrecy, consequently no settlement of Mrs. Adair's fortune was ever made on her; during her lifetime no injustice accrued to her from this oversight, as her husband consulted her scrupulously in every outlay he made for their mutual benefit, and invariably insisted on paying into her own hands the quarterly instalments he received of her fortune. When she died her only surviving child was naturally looked upon as being the heir to his mother's property. General Adair rather aided this impression during his lifetime by giving his boy such advantages as might be supposed to belong to the future possessor of £5000 per annum (for such was the produce of the deceased Mrs. Adair's fortune); but to the astonishment of all, excepting those who had known Xerxes Cadogan, and who imagined that his widow must have caught from him some of his acuteness with regard to money

matters, it was discovered at General Adair's death that he bequeathed all he had to his widow, with the exception of a sum, which, put into Consols, was sufficient to allow Geoffry £500 a year. He "also recommended his boy to Mrs. Adair's protection and affection." "And it shall be my pleasure as well as duty," said the widow, piously lifting up her eyes to realms in which they seemed, by their rapt expression, to discern the spirit of her late husband hovering in the yellow fog that obscured her lawyer's chambers in the city, "to act by that dear boy as if I were indeed his mother."

So, as I have said, Geoffry did not feel any pecuniary deprivations from his father's death; his stepmother made him a liberal allowance, and at his age the thought, as to whether he should in future possess £500 or £5000 a year, affected him very little.

Certainly, as far as appearances went, on this particular morning at Oaklands, young

Adair had every reason to be contented with his lot, for no man in the field boasted a handsomer mount than Orangeman, or one that looked more like "work."

"Who's that lad, I wonder?" said Mr. Chesham, the keen-eyed master, as Geoffry, separating himself from his friends, brought his chestnut leisurely round to the other side of the cover, "a neat seat and hand, and gad, what a handsome beast he's on—the young profligate!—Can't have cost less than a hundred guineas."

"*Ecco la Mita!*" said Geoffry, softly, to himself, as he passed the master, and the master stared all the harder.

"His tongue's Italian, but his legs are English, that I'll swear!" the latter said, following the easy, and yet assured, seat of the youth with his eyes; and then Mr. Chesham turned his attention to some one else, and for the moment forgot all about the chestnut and its rider.

## CHAPTER XII.

"Th' impatient courser pants in ev'ry vein,  
And, pawing, seems to beat the distant plain;  
Hills, vales, and floods appear already cross'd,  
And ere he starts a thousand steps are lost."

POPE.

OAKLANDS was a favourite meet, and Geoffrey had a good opportunity of contrasting the appearance of an English "field" of sportsmen with the motley assemblage he had been accustomed to see gathered together under the shadow of Roman ruins, to pursue the fox over the desolate wastes of the Campagna.

Geoffrey felt and acknowledged to himself that for this kind of sport, the comparison was much in favour of the English landscape—the soft, tumbled-looking clouds that floated over the woodland; the wood-

land itself, nay, even the stumpy trees that lined the hedgerows, and the birds that fluttered in and out thereof, whose nests made round-looking shadows in the bare thicket, they all seemed like so many friendly companions, so many landmarks, to give evidence of neighbourhood. "If I lose my way in this country," thought Geoffry, "there are plenty of houses to put me on my course again;" and then he thought of a certain December evening, two years before, when the superiority of his horse carried him so far away from the rest of his companions that he lost them altogether; and, having mistaken the road, found himself some hours later staring all round the dismal, windy plains that stretched away in solemn monotony till they joined the low, yellow line of sky, striving to guess, by the only clue afforded him—namely, one or two gaunt, broken columns (that looked even drearier, from their utter disconnection with anything

habitable, than the empty plains themselves)—what might be the road to take that would lead him to Rome. He remembered, too, how, as the night deepened, and the winds increased their wail, he lost heart, and nearly cried, for the rush of the sea seemed to become mixed with the moan of the wind, and from his ignorance of the geography he could not tell whether he might not be moving in the darkness towards some cliff's edge, and then how hard he found it to smother his tears, when he fortunately encountered a herdsman, who, with bare knees and goat-skin mantle, which accorded well with the savage nature of the scene, started up from behind a clump of grass, and volunteered, for a few baiocchi, to guide the little Inglese home to Rome.

It took Geoffry far less time to remember than me to record this episode of the past, and his attention was soon recalled to the business of the day, for the hounds were

already in possession of the covert, and every man was, if I may be allowed the expression, "pricking up his ears" anxiously as he awaited the result.

For a few moments comparative silence fell on the assembly: one or two "knowing ones" strolled off quietly to "favourite points;" nearly all settled themselves in their saddles, and gathered up their reins. Even the ladies (there were three out), with feminine tact, ceased to worry their male companions with inappropriate observations; for to the nervous (and there are many such) on these occasions, what observations are there that do not come *mal à propos* to a man who is undergoing the process of "winding himself up," often with much the same difficulty that is experienced in screwing up a stiff, obstinate guitar-string, that slips from under the hand at each effort to elevate its tone?

Dapple, dapple flapped the hounds' ears, and patter, patter, went their busy little

feet through the dry leaves and creeping tangles of the underwood, when a clear, musical yelp sent a sort of electric thrill through men and horses.

Another, and then another, and the chorus is taken up quickly; there is a desperate rush towards one side of the cover, the hounds tear, scramble, and drop in and then out of the outside ditch, and are quickly over the next field, streaming down wind in a compact body, while one or two horsemen farther on have the satisfaction of seeing a handsome-looking brush bob up and over a fence with the rapidity of lightning, as the fox seems literally to fly across country, with the advantage of at least two fields between him and his pursuers.

Geoffrey had made up his mind that, whatever he did, he would not put himself in a position to be taunted for any gross blunder that day. "If I killed a hound, or upset a man, or overrode the scent, or

anything dreadful of that kind, I should never get over it," he said, and he attempted to turn the chesnut's head towards as lonely a line as he could pick out among the scattered groups of horsemen. The chestnut bitterly resented the interference; his temper had been working up to blazing point ever since he had heard that first quick holloa, and now he commenced kicking so violently that Geoffry had some trouble in keeping his seat. Moreover, the latter found to his horror that every time he applied spur and whip, he was answered by fresh kicks, and that so far from making any advance towards the fast receding pack, he was going back in the direction of the ditch they had just come out at.

'Oh, d—— you! get on," said the boy, in helpless despair, and then he relaxed his reins, and ceased to make any further effort with hand or heel; the ruse succeeded; Orangeman, no longer occupied

in fighting, dashed forward with a plunge and a pull, and was presently settled down into an easy gallop, which showed his fine proportions to perfection, as he strode over the heavy plough with as much ease as if it were the soundest turf.

Geoffry had hardly recovered from the confusion of mind he had been thrown into by his brief but fierce contest with Orangeman, when a high brown line seemed to spring suddenly from the earth before his bewildered eyes, and with a crash, bang, slip, and up again, he found himself in another field, with a wide ditch behind him, and the hounds straight in front, but still divided from him by two fields; he could see them streaming up a bit of upland, followed by one or two scarlet coats that presently disappeared over the brow of the hill; these belonged to the fortunate few who had stationed themselves at favourable points up the

country, and who had been the first to view the fox away. Geoffry was, however, in advance of the rest of the field, he having unconsciously taken a short cut, by accepting a fence where the landing on the off side was so notoriously rotten that nearly every one else had gone a quarter of a mile farther up, to a corner where three fields met, to avoid it.

Geoffry now began to enjoy himself: his eyes sparkled as the wind swept by his tingling cheeks, and every advancing stride of Orangeman brought him nearer to the pack; looking back, he saw the field dotted over by those who had escaped from their bondage, in the triangular corner in which they had been held by the press of the crowd, and who were bustling up the furrows with all the speed they could.

Among these Geoffry discerned Bentham's solid figure bobbing up and down uncomfortably under the wild, uneven bounds made by Nora, in her efforts to get for-

ward,—efforts that were partly suppressed by the dead weight Bentham's hands were keeping down each side of her mouth. Colburn was still farther behind, applying whip and spur to Little John, in a frantic endeavour to move that leisurely animal out of the steady trot, which was all he considered necessary to keep his stable-friend and companion, Nora, in view.

Hitherto Orangeman had not relaxed his speed since the auspicious moment when he first decided to begin his gallop, but now, as Geoffrey neared the last fence that separated him from the hounds, his horse slackened his pace into first a slow trot and finally a walk. Then with cat-like caution he crept up a rather high, steep bank and stared meditatively into the ditch on the other side; Geoffrey had had enough of interfering with his horse, and gave him his head, but happening to glance behind him he saw that Nora had taken the law into her own hands or rather legs, and was

bearing down upon him with the speed of a cannon-ball. Incautiously Geoffry pressed his heels against the chestnut's side, and that capricious animal wheeling suddenly round began to gallop wildly up the field; Geoffry turned him by a strong effort, and the chestnut flew furiously at the bank without a vestige of his former caution, excepting that he struck his heels against it in a masterly manner as he flew over with an impetus which brought him ploughing up the ground some yards in advance on the other side. "That horse is a clipper," was the emphatic assertion made by Mr. Chesham, as he edged his pony slowly through a gap made close to a tree a little farther up, and then he followed in the chestnut's wake, and was soon out of poor Bentham's sight. Bentham, who was only relieved from the fear of becoming an involuntary homicide to find himself being bucked all over the place, for Nora, disappointed of her expected lead had swerved

suddenly round, and was relieving her excited feelings by a succession of plunges more agreeable to herself than to her rider. To add to his bitterness he saw the last wave of the chestnut's tail as it disappeared in the distance. "And that fellow is a workman, after all," he ejaculated; "and oh! do be still, you brute!"

At this juncture Little John trotted up, and after his sedate fashion, crawled through the gap; he was followed by Nora with a vehemence which showed very little consideration for her rider's leg, which was scraped cruelly against the tree.

Presently a welcome sight met Bentham's eyes, and a welcome silence fell upon the air.

"They've left off their horrible 'Hark forrads,'" he said, cheerfully; "and I do believe; yes, there is a check," and then he and several others took advantage of the pause to gallop up with a recklessness which was meant to induce people to believe

that they had been going as hard as any one else during the last ten minutes, but their temporary self-assertion was doomed to be short-lived, for a sagacious old hound, who was so covered with scars that he looked as if bits had been chipped out of him with a chisel, and who was appropriately named "Ulysses," after the crafty hero of old, quickly hit off the line; with noisy joy the rest of the pack testified their coincidence with their leader's penetration, and in less than two minutes the hounds were again in full cry, making such running as threatened to distance all pursuers.

Mr. Chesham was there on his gallant little roan, but then he always managed to save his horse so well during a day's work that he could generally afford a good extra spurt when it was required. Bentham was there, for Nora was determined to show her powers in spite of him, and having out-paced little John, she had decided to follow the chestnut.

The country was becoming very heavy, and none but light weights on good horses could be expected to hold their own much longer. Nora's coat was white with sweat, but the chestnut had only begun to look a little darker in the gold lights of his neck, and his action was as grand as when he started. The field was now reduced to seven, and consisted of the two boys (Adair and Bentham), the master, the huntsman, two other men in pink, and a lady—a lady who had been riding well in front all day, whose striking appearance would have challenged admiration, even had she not taken so successful and prominent a part in the day's sport. With a face that glowed just enough to make it look charmingly full of life, with flashing brown eyes, and coils of bright-coloured brown hair drawn up tightly under her hat, with a supple, rather full figure, that swayed in her saddle with a voluptuous grace of outline pleasant to look at, with a light hand and steady

seat—such was the lady who, with the remaining few that now constituted the field, galloped down to a small fence, through which the hounds had just scrambled with unabated ardour.

“It’s too good to last much longer,” thought Geoffry, regretfully, as Orangeman swept over this last obstacle with a bound that would have cleared a five-barred gate.

“Never knew such a beast,” the master said, as he, too, made his way through the fence. He was thinking of the fox, but ere the words were well out of his mouth he had occasion to transfer the epithet, for Nora made up her mind to follow the track of the roan, and, despite Bentham’s wild cry of despair, and the desperate effort he made to turn her, she had accomplished her purpose with such indecorous haste as to cannon against the master just as the roan was lifting him gently in the air, preparatory to landing on the other side, and to knock him clean out of the

saddle. Unhappy Bentham ! why could not he and Nora at once jump into a gulf like Curtius, and hide in death their terrible disgrace ? The master was a gentleman, and in the first shock of the surprise he had cried, " Hey, what ! I beg your pardon ;" being under the momentary impression that it was his own fault. But the master was a man, and as he struggled to regain his legs, he called Bentham's mother by epithets which would have startled that poor modest lady, could she have heard him.

Bentham flung himself off Nora and caught the roan, who had strayed to a bit of dewy pasture, which she fancied would be nice and refreshing after her fatigue.

" I beg ten thousand pardons," he muttered, feebly, as he met the eye of the master glaring at him with a baleful expression, as the latter regained his seat in the saddle.

" Ten thousand devils !" cried that angry gentleman : and then he dashed off in pur-

suit of the pack, and came up to them just in time to see the last hound vanishing through an aperture in a flight of park palings.

“By Jove!” cried the master, breathless with excitement, “they’ve got into Lord Snelgrove’s park, and it’s five miles long. What’s to be done now?”

“Is there no place anywhere we can get in at?” cried the lady, who seemed ready to cry with vexation.

“None whatever,” answered Mr. Chesham, emphatically. “The scoundrel keeps locked gates, and mends his palings twice a year.”

The lady looked lovingly at Orangeman, and lifting her eyes she met those of Geoffry.

“If I had such a horse as that, I’d take him at anything,” she said, softly.

The lad laughed. The paling was about four feet six inches in height.

“I wonder whether he’ll face it,” he thought. Then, without a moment’s delay,

he wheeled the chestnut round, and took him back a few yards.

“ Stop ! stop, sir ! I’ve got a key,” cried the huntsman.

“ Good God, boy ! what are you about ?” screamed Mr. Chesham ; but ere he had finished the exclamation, Orangeman was galloping towards the palings, and Mr. Chesham felt his heart in his mouth as the horse, collecting himself at about two yards from the fence, rose with a mighty jump, and cleared it in magnificent style, his hind legs only just brushing the topmost bar.

“ I’ll give you two hundred guineas for him,” cried Mr. Chesham, enthusiastically.

And the lady’s eye glistened ; and she looked as if she, too, would like to grant an adequate reward for this daring act.

By this time the huntsman had unlocked his gate, and had received a curse from the master for not having produced his key sooner. The party galloped through a

shady avenue of limes, when presently a sound, or rather a chorus of sounds, that came a little from the right, made Mr. Chesham turn pale with mortification :

“ They’ve killed, by G— !” he cried ; and after they had cantered another quarter of a mile they came upon Geoffry, standing by his horse’s head, while the hounds lay round him in various attitudes of contentment and fatigue.

“ I was too late to save any of him for you,” the youth said, advancing towards the owner of the brown eyes.

The latter smiled kindly at him, and then Miss Sophy Vane called to the gentleman who was in attendance on her :

“ Mr. Herbert,” she said in a low tone, “ I want you to find out this boy’s name, and to be civil to him.”

“ Certainly, dearest,” was the acquiescent reply.

And this was how Geoffry first made Sophy Herbert’s acquaintance.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“Nurse, cherish, never cavil away the wholesome horror of *debt*. Personal liberty is the paramount essential to human dignity and human happiness. Man hazards the condition, and loses the virtues, of freeman, in proportion as he accustoms his thoughts to view without anguish or shame his lapse into the bondage of debtor.”

E. B. LYTTON.

It has been hinted in a former chapter how Mrs. Herbert, *née* Miss Vane, “improved the occasion,” afforded her by her acquaintance with Mr. Clutterbuck’s handsome pupil. True, he was as she said “a mere lad,” but he gave the impression of being older than he was, an impression confirmed by his foreign ease of manner.

Miss Vane admired “pluck” above all things in a man, and, next to pluck, she admired beauty; both of these Geoffry had

already shown himself possessed of in a remarkable degree; yet for a long while Miss Vane did not cease to regard him as otherwise than a kind of handsome, agreeable toy, which she was to pet and patronize, much in the same fashion as she used to treat her dolls, in her earlier years, until that evening when, four years after their first meeting, she discovered that the image of this "boy" had crept into her heart, much to the detriment of him who was that heart's lawful owner. Sophy Vane had been engaged to plain, middle-aged, wealthy Mr. Herbert ever since she was fifteen, still, had this "boy" chosen to return her kiss in the spirit in which it was offered on that evening before her marriage, I think she would have willingly thrown over Mr. Herbert, of Castle Herbert, for the sake of sharing with this disinherited youth his £500 a year and his little villa in Tuscany. But we have made a long digression, or rather retrogression, from the chapter where we

described Captain Adair as being detained in town by Sophy's manœuvres, and we will now return to that drawing-room in H—— Street, wherein Mrs. Herbert contrived that Geoffry should spend so much of his time.

The month, as we said, which Sophy had petitioned for, had elapsed, and another four weeks might have slipped by in the same way, had not Mrs. Herbert herself been unexpectedly summoned from town. Her eldest child, a little girl who was living at a fashionable school at Brighton, was suddenly taken ill with an infectious disorder which had also attacked some of her companions. Her schoolmistress, in writing to acquaint Mrs. Herbert with this fact, suggested that it would be as well if the latter could remove dear Mabel to her (Mrs. Herbert's) own house at —— Marine Parade, as the number of cases made it difficult for the schoolmistress to attend equally well to all.

We have said that Mrs. Herbert was fond of her children, and we do her but justice in affirming that the receipt of this intelligence made her really unhappy, but she was selfish enough to feel very keenly the prospect of leaving town at the height of the season, to hide her brilliant eyes in the darkness of a sick-room at what was now a lonely, glaring watering-place. She thought of her little dinner parties, all light, wit, and sparkle; of her pleasant evenings at the opera, when leaning back in her box she would dream herself away into the music, carrying her own and Geoffry's image into every love scene—every passionate duo that was sung in garden bower or shadowed chamber.

"Oh dear! what a nuisance it is," she sighed; but when George Herbert said, "of course you will go directly, dear?" she answered promptly, "Oh! of course." George kissed her, and said she was "an angel," and Mrs. Herbert accepted the

compliment with a conscious air of modest merit.

“I must go,” she said to herself. “If Mabel died, I should never forgive myself. I should always have it on my mind.”

By this it will be seen that Sophy’s selfishness was actuating her even when she seemed generous. It was not so much love for her little daughter that took the mother to the sick-bed ; it was the fear of future self-accusation assailing her in case she omitted to do her duty, that determined her to make the sacrifice of leaving London for Brighton.

It was this selfish species of good-nature, this conscientious kind of love for those who lived with her, that made Sophy’s life a constant war to herself. She was sufficiently fond of George Herbert to be careful never to vex him by an unkind word, or by any action done against his expressed wishes ; but she did not love him enough to keep herself pure at heart for

his sake; she did not regard his wishes with sufficient reverence to prevent her doing things privately, which would have broken his heart had he even dreamt of their existence. She gave him lip-service and eye-service, and after having made any slight personal sacrifice to please her husband, she felt entitled to grant herself a comfortable absolution for the next sin against him she felt inclined to commit. It was much the same with her children: she endured at odd times more trouble from them than people gave her credit for, simply because she knew that moments would come when, in her occupation with Geoffrey, and the amusements in which he shared, these innocents must inevitably suffer a good deal of neglect at her hands, and she loved them, these little bits of flesh of her flesh, and they held a certain authority over her, so she indulged them to their heart's content, at those seasons when chance or necessity severed her from

Captain Adair, that she might feel the easier when, in her re-union with *him*, she allowed herself to forget *them*; still it was certainly a great effort to leave him at this juncture, and once having made up her mind to the sacrifice and started by an express train for Brighton, she allowed herself to luxuriate in irritation, and snubbed her husband, in a manner quite unusual to her, but then she was doing a virtuous action much against the grain, and felt she might accord herself such small privileges. Meanwhile, having heard nothing of Gerald Lisle for some time, and excepting that he was absent from town, she hoped that Geoffrey might not at least yet awhile find an opportunity of availing himself of Gerald's invitation of nearly two months ago—and so she went. And London seemed so dull without her, and the closed windows in H—— Street so blank and forbidding to Geoffrey as he passed them daily on his road to the club, that he

declared he would leave town himself; where he would go he could not yet determine, but he thought of taking a month's leave and revisiting some of his boyish haunts in Italy.

"I wonder what has become of Pietro," he said, with a yawn, as he stared out of the window of his lodgings.

An old woman crouched at the corner of the street, with a stall of dust-dimmed oranges before her, and the young man thought longingly of their golden yellow he had seen peeping in and out of the dark-green leaves in the groves round Genoa. "I'll go," he said, "but first I'll go to Lucca. The very sound of that river brawling down the rocks would make me feel young and cool again."

Meanwhile, what had become of Gerald Lisle, that he was absent from London during the gayest part of the season? Why had he deserted the Bond Street tailor, at whose shrine he was so meek

and subservient a follower? The opera, he affected to criticise; the beauties of the ballet, whom he avowed he adored, and all the thousand other enjoyments of town-life, the participation in which induces so many young men of Gerald's calibre to believe that they thereby entitle themselves to the designation of "men of the world." Gerald had disappeared from London shortly after that interview he had with Mrs. Herbert in H—— Street. His absence from his usual haunts at first caused no little surprise to his friends, and no small alarm to his creditors, but the friendship which is composed of such little coincidences as meeting the same man three or four times a day in the same club, ball-room, or playhouse, is not made of very strong links; Gerald's creditors were more tenacious of memory, but the most importunate of these were quieted by the information given them, in confidence, by Gerald's valet, "that master was gone

into the country to see his father." The very word "father" breathes hope and comfort into the minds of the most anxious tradesman, and the extravagant youth who can boast of a "father living in the country" will have at least twelve months longer credit given him than he could procure were he an orphan.

Gerald's friends were not more surprised by his absence from town than were the Lisles at his unexpected arrival at Gardenhurst.

Colonel Lisle was enjoying his evening cigar on the ragged lawn, whereon the daisies had already shut themselves up for the night, when he was aroused from the contemplation of his paper by the sound of carriage wheels.

"Who the dev—why, it's Gerald!" began and ended the colonel in the same breath, and in his astonishment he departed from the usual stately regularity of his pace, and almost ran towards the

front door, at which his son was descending slowly, being somewhat embarrassed by the paraphernalia of sealskin rug and great-coat, &c., which the delicate youth had thought it necessary to adopt for protection from the night air.

"How are you, gov?" Gerald inquired, in an amiable voice, as soon as he had divested himself of his wraps, while his father answered the greeting with suspicious civility, much as one dog answers the advances of another when both are smelling a bone in the air. Gerald entered the house, and embraced his mother and Christine with a graceful condescension peculiarly his own.

"I hope I find you well, mother," he said, sweetly. Then, without waiting for an answer, he turned to Christine with "Christy, dear, will you see that my portmanteau is taken up to my room carefully, very carefully, if you please, as there are some bottles of scent in it; and, oh, Chris-

tine, will you have some hot water taken to my room, and will you see about some dinner for me. I am afraid I'm too late for yours," he added, consulting his little gold watch.

Christine looked up rebelliously. In her heart she said, "Carry up your own portmanteau. You know we keep no men-servants. Fetch your own hot water, and go without your dinner, as you've chosen to arrive so late." But she reflected that as he had only just arrived he was for the moment on the footing of a guest. So she conquered the uncivil impulse, and only remarked, drily, "Dolly and I will carry up your portmanteau. I will take up the hot water, and I will broil you a chop and make you an omelette as soon as I can get a clear fire, for cook is out."

I think that Christine had laid a slight emphasis on the pronoun "I," in the faint hope that the little reproach conveyed therein might strike home to Gerald's conscience. If so, the poor child was

disappointed, for her brother, catching her eye as she left the room, merely said, approvingly, "Do dear; thank you."

"Lor, what does Mr. Gerald want to come worriting here for at this time of night?" was old Dolly's peevish remark, as she had to upraise her bones just as they had settled into comfortable stiffness in her arm-chair, to get out sheets for the spare bed, and to re-make the fire, which had long since died away, in the kitchen-grate.

"That's just what I think," said Christine; then she added, pensively, "I wonder when he is going away?"

And when she awoke the next morning the same thought recurred to her mind, for she had to arise early (and Christine was not very fond of early rising) to assist Dolly in the preparations for Gerald's breakfast.

"Young people take a deal of washing, now-a-days," said Dolly, as she rolled a washing-tub towards Gerald's room, and deposited it with a vicious bang at his door.

“And I ’spose they think themselves mighty clean when they pour a pailful o’ cold water over their heads, as if it didn’t run off ’em as it would off a duck’s back.”

Gerald was, as usual, quite unconscious of any inconvenience caused by the constant occupation he provided for every member of his mother’s limited household.

He strolled about the house in the morning, resplendent in a richly flowered dressing-gown, and slippers to match. And in the evening he gave a certain air of formal magnificence to the unpretending meal, which answered to the name of dinner, by arraying himself in the glossiest of dress coats, and the most spotless of finely-worked shirts.

These dinners, formerly so cheerful and unconstrained, seemed to grow quite solemn under the influence of Gerald’s irreproachable costume, and the kindly patronage of his manner.

The one sole that lay on the dish, which,

by a tacit understanding between Mrs. Lisle and her daughter, was left for the consumption of the gentlemen, was discussed in solemn silence by father and son; the former, who ate the faster, would sometimes take advantage of his having first regained the power of speech, to fling some little snarl across the table at his son.

"I see you young men all wear those turn-down collars now-a-days, like what poor Byron used to wear. Ah, well! *he* could afford it, for *he* had a beautiful throat." And the Colonel glanced slightly at the somewhat "picked bird" aspect of his son's neck.

"Ah, yes," said the latter, pleasantly, "I've always understood that stiff, high chokers were invented to cover some deformity of throat that disfigured George the Fourth. What an unpleasant idea it makes them convey, doesn't it, sir."

"Not necessarily," growled the Colonel, moving his head uneasily in his neckcloth;

and then the little spar being over, silence fell on the group again until Christine and her mother withdrew, and then Gerald would draw his chair nearer to his father, and endeavour to turn the conversation into some channel that would interest or amuse the older man.

He was not without tact and shrewdness, this selfish young Sybarite, and on this occasion, as he had an object to gain, he made his little selfishnesses pander to his great ones by taking the trouble to converse on subjects utterly uninteresting to himself, with the view of pleasing his father; he even made what was to his indulged taste the greater sacrifice of foregoing his usual allowance of claret, and permitted the colonel to finish the bottle by himself, which the latter did, with an irritating affectation of abstraction.

"I say, sir," observed Gerald, watching wistfully the dark line of the wine as it got lower and lower down the bottle, "that this

present age, with all its hot-press system of education, cannot produce such officers as did the old Peninsula campaigns."

"You are quite right, my boy, perfectly right," and the colonel helped himself cordially to another glass. "But the fact is, sir, you start on a mistaken principle altogether in imagining that you can force soldiers as you can cucumbers. A really good soldier, sir, is as rare as an aloe bloom. Scholarship will not make him, nor want of scholarship prevent his military abilities, if he have any, exhibiting themselves. Look at the Duke. I wonder what number of 'marks' he could have gained at a competitive examination. Certainly not many in French, and I should think he was shady in the classics; but in the field, sir — ah, that was the time to see him!" And—

"Something that spoke of other days,  
When the keen eyes could firmly gaze,  
Through battle's crimson glare,"

lighted up the colonel's wrinkled face. It was the memory of an old excitement, of a great glory which he had shared in when his hair was brown and his cheek red.

"Ah!" he continued, enthusiastically, "there were giants in those days; it will be long ere the present age can show such men as commanded us in the Peninsula. There were real soldiers then, soldiers to the manner born, and born, also, of experience. That's one of the principal ingredients that go towards making a good officer. We give our boys the tuition of learned dons to coach them for examination where other learned dons will test their abilities; but we can't give them what would be really useful, a hot day with an enemy's fire in front! Theoretically, sir, you combine, or endeavour to do, the soldier, mathematician, classic, philosopher, chemist, linguist, geologist, &c., in one; and yet I don't believe that you," added the

colonel, looking viciously at his son, "would know how to command your troops in action, not only if your mens' lives, but your own, depended on it."

"Yes, I should," said the young man, placidly; "my sergeant-major would tell me what to do!"

"And supposing he should be shot first, sir?"

That was a contingency which had not occurred to Gerald, but he answered, readily, "Oh, there are plenty of very clever fellows in my troop. I dare say I should get on somehow; but we have fallen upon peaceful days, you know, and the great military abilities which adorned your time would be thrown away now. If your age nourished good practical soldiers, we at least have some very fine theorists."

"True," answered his father. "But if war *did* arise, I'd rather raise a handful of the practical men that have dissolved into dust under the Belgian cornfields than have all

the members of the Staff College under my command. A soldier should be quick-eyed, quick-eared, active in mind as body, clear of comprehension, bold in enterprise and prudent in its completion, ready, yet cautious, self-assured, yet not conceited. Such, sir, was he who commanded me on the last day I ever drew a sword :

‘He, in the shock of charging hosts, unmoved,  
Amidst confusion, horror, and despair,  
Examin’d all the dreadful scenes of war ;  
In peaceful thought the field of death surveyed,  
To fainting squadrons sent the timely aid,  
Inspir’d repulsed battalions to engage,  
And taught the doubtful battle where to rage,’”

quoted the Colonel, in a fine sonorous voice. “And, now, Gerald,” he added kindly, for he was pleased at having heard the sound of his own voice for so long, “let us drink to the immortal memory of Arthur, Duke of Wellington,” and he emptied his glass, apparently unconscious that the fact of Gerald’s being empty debarred the latter from taking part in the toast.

Gerald bestowed nearly equal pains on his endeavours to conciliate the other members of the household ; he had been to the Royal Academy of the year, and he had brought down with him to Gardenhurst a catalogue, wherein he had marked as his especial favourites those pictures on which public opinion had already pronounced favourable judgment. Mrs. Lisle would glance eagerly down the list of artists, seeking (generally in vain) to recognise in the names of those most celebrated, some of the companions of her old artist life.

“ Millais, Frith, Faed, Elmore, who are these ? ” she asked, impatiently ; “ I know nothing of these people. It was Etty who used to stand over my easel when I was young ; John Moore picked out his masterly folds of white satin by my side (he died young, poor fellow) ; Maclise was *our* rising man ; his brother artists used to wonder what line he would adopt when his

genius further developed. There was "Vinegar" Uwins, with his sour face and balmy colouring; there was poor Dick Brown, who made such clever designs, and sold them in a lot for fourteen shillings to an impostor, who, passing them off to the Brothers Finden as his own, received forty pounds for them. Finden detected the fraud by presenting some proofs to the would-be artist to touch up, which, of course, the latter failed to do. Finden found out the real Simon Pure, but too late to be of any assistance to him, he was dying of starvation in an attic."

"Shocking," said Gerald, gently, as he twirled his whiskers round his finger, and then asked, with feigned interest, what Etty had thought of such and such a picture which she had painted? What was the subject which she was painting now? Oh, Clarissa Harlowe and the two courtesans bidding her welcome to Mrs. Sinclair. "And who was Clarissa? What a funny

dress. She has a look of Christine. Done from Christine. Oh, that accounts for it; and the flower-pot in the window; so like life!"

"He means well, poor dear," Mrs. Leslie said, kindly, when Christine dissected her brother's art-criticisms, with a quiet satire all her own. "He wishes to give me pleasure, and it is not his fault if he doesn't know that I'd rather have my Clarissa's face appreciated than Mrs. Sinclair's flower-pot."

"I wonder what his object is in coming?" Christine observed, suspiciously.

This astute young lady had not been in the least beguiled by Gerald's efforts at propitiation. It may have been that he took less trouble, or showed less tact when he came in contact with her. Certainly, such observations as:

"Christine, the way you do your hair is positively savage. You really must allow me to send you some prints of the French

style of coiffure; I know one that would suit you exactly."

Or :

"Christy, why don't Lady Renshawe dress you and Esty properly? really it's a shame that you should be so disfigured;" were not calculated to please the rising vanity of sixteen.

Moreover, the young are so quick to penetrate and stern to judge. Mrs. Leslie was Gerald's mother, and her estimate of that ambrosial youth was softened by her affection, and her own unselfish nature; but Christine, less unselfish, and less prejudiced, saw through her brother's "humbug," as she designated his unusual efforts to make himself agreeable, so clearly as to make her presence a continual bug-bear to him; he would pause uncomfortably in the midst of his most honeyed phrases, when he saw his young sister's blue eyes fixed on him with an expression half inquiring, half ridicule, and at last he

decided to himself that "he had had enough of this, and it was time to come to the point." So, after a few more days sojourn at Gardenhurst, he announced one morning that business re-called him to town, and that he must leave home that evening.

Mrs. Lisle looked grieved. The plausible youth of the last week, the Gerald who was kindly, courteous, and affectionate, had so twined himself round her heart that she had been able to put away the memory of the Gerald who had been conceited, selfish, and disagreeable. In the last few days he had seemed to be her own again—as much her own as when he was a flaxen-headed babe, holding her guiding hand in his dimpled fingers.

"Must you go, my son?" she asked, tenderly.

"No help for it, mother—not a matter of choice, I assure you; if it were, do you think I would leave home? Father, can I speak a word or two with you presently?"

"After breakfast, in the library," said the colonel, with dignity.

Poor gentleman! he had been so influenced by the flattery his son had speciously administered to him lately, that, far from anticipating any unpleasant communication, he actually fancied that Gerald was going to consult him—to ask his advice about some regimental subject—some little disagreement with his colonel, perhaps—or some entanglement of a tenderer kind. "Who should a boy come to but his father?" the colonel said, complacently, as he settled his head in his shirt-collars while waiting the impending interview.

When Gerald entered the library, he sank negligently in a chair, and for the first few minutes said nothing, and only played with a paper which lay on his father's table.

"Please put that down, unless you want to use it," said the colonel, who hated to have any article in his room displaced.

Gerald, deprived of that resource, took to twirling his moustache, and, as he did so, it might have been observed that the lips, disclosed by this restless movement, were growing paler every moment.

“Father,” he said at last, speaking with a difficulty rare to his fluent tongue—“Colonel! could you oblige me—would it be very inconvenient to you—can you accommodate—me—with—an advance?”

“With a what—oh—h—h?” was all the colonel could say, his blue eyes flashing at the force of the blow that had fallen on him. His face fell to a lugubrious length, and then he answered, with military brevity: “No! I can’t!” And he took up the newspaper, with a sign that he concluded the subject finished; but curiosity conquered, and he laid it down to ask a few questions:

“What have you been about, sir?”

“Backing bills, running race-horses, entertaining friends, and buying bouquets—

in fact, gov, I'm sorry to say that I've been during these last twelve months living at the rate of five thousand a year."

"And your allowance is, I think——"

"Five hundred pounds" answered Gerald, promptly.

"I suppose you are not mad enough to think I can clear you. What about your commission—have you mortgaged that?"

"Yes, gov."

"Have you," and here the old man's face assumed a pained expression—"have you been raising post-obits on my life?"

"No, father! no!" the young man said, indignantly.

"A man who is involved will do any dirty action," observed the colonel, sententiously. "But why do you come to me?" he continued.

"Because I am nearly ruined, and thought that you might help me."

"How, pray?"

"Couldn't you" (and here Gerald began

to hesitate again)—“couldn’t *you* raise a little money for me as the next heir by entail to my grand-aunt—to Lady Renshaw’s property?”

The young man leant forward in his chair, and looked anxiously at his father. No one but his poor, worried, debt-haunted self could estimate the importance of the answer to his question.

Colonel Lisle looked agitated. He rose from his seat, and walked quickly up and down the room, and consulted his snuff-box rapidly.

“I am afraid that what I have to say will be unpleasant news to you,” he said at last.

“Yes, father!”

Gerald spoke resignedly. He had been used to receive unpleasant intelligence of late.

“The entail is—in fact—there is no entail! Of course I shall (and you after me, my dear boy) inherit Lynncourt—that is a matter of course; but the fact is, the entail is cut off.”

“WHAT!”

Gerald showed no resignation now. He started from his chair, and his face turned deadly white, while his eyes seemed to blaze out of his head.

“Don’t be violent; it can’t be helped,” said his father. “The fact is, you know, when I was a young man I was something like you, Gerald—an extravagant, good-for-nothing scamp. By a peculiar wording of the late Lord Renshaw’s will, his daughter was enabled, in conjunction with the next heir, to cut off the entail. The next heir, getting deucedly hard up, and being then of opinion, as he is now, that Lady Renshaw would live for ever, agreed to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, and, for the sum of fifty thousand pounds, gave his grand-aunt permission to choose the next heir for herself.”

“Is this true?” Gerald asked, laying his hand on his father’s arm.

“Of course it is,” said the other, testily.

“Why the deuce should I invent a cock and a bull story only to worry you?”

“And why was I never told of this?”

“Why should you have been? I am not bound to be a self-accusing Noah, and hold up my faults to the derision of my sons. But for your own selfish extravagance you would never have found it out at all.”

“I should have found it out quickly enough if the countess died leaving her property to a stranger, and so would my creditors,—I can tell you. Nothing but the presumption that I should one day inherit Lynncourt has kept them at bay so long. Oh! it's too bad,—too bad!” groaned the young man, burying his head in his hands.

“Not at all,” said his father; “you were quite ready just now to have entered into any arrangement to help yourself at this juncture, regardless of the future injury it might entail on your children; you would

smother Lynncourt with mortgages, if you could by so doing meet the present exigencies of your position. That's just what I felt at your age. Like you, I indulged too much in the luxury of 'backing bills, running horses, buying bouquets, et cetera,' and my entanglements at last grew so serious that my being the next heir to Lynncourt availed me nothing, and I was obliged to turn the empty honour of prospective heirship into substantial cash. Unfortunately, my poor boy, my having done so prevents your reaping any immediate advantage from the estate in *your* hour of need, beyond that which you have enjoyed, namely, the reputation of being the future possessor of it."

"It's just that which has ruined me," Gerald said, moodily. "I was brought up to believe that I should one day succeed to a large property, and I wake from a fool's dream to find that I have been living on prospects that don't exist; I have been

cruelly deceived, and what a cursed fate is mine !”

“ Stuff and nonsense !” the colonel said, with an irritated slap of his snuff-box lid, which nearly immolated his own thumb. “ You always had a talent for involving yourself, Gerald ; as a boy of ten you ran deeply in debt to a toffey vendor ; at sixteen you had proposed to marry a baker’s daughter, a pretty girl, though somewhat floury, and nothing but her own prior attachment to the butcher’s boy saved you from perpetrating that act of insanity ; your propensities, my boy, all point towards entanglements, and as for putting the faults of your disposition on ‘ fate or deception,’ that is folly.”

“ You can’t even let me have a few hundreds father, to stave off my butcher and baker with ?”

“ Utterly impossible ! Gerald, you must be mad to ask it ; my income only just suffices to pay our way, even in this dull

country-place, I never have more than a couple of pounds in my pocket when the week's bills are paid. We pay them weekly now," the colonel said, with a look of virtuous pride, and he added, "thank Heaven, Gerald, I don't owe a shilling in the world."

He did not, however, think it necessary to explain that Lady Renshawe had made this punctuality in paying his debts a *sine qua non* with the Lisles as long as they should choose to reside in her county, and as long as they accepted of pecuniary aid from herself.

"I am sorry for you, Gerald, very! You are reaping the fruits of your own imprudence, and I dare say you find them to be berries hard to swallow and bitter to digest; but I must leave you now, I am going out for my constitutional; God bless you, my boy." And Colonel Lisle resumed his newspaper, and, lighting his cigar, stepped out briskly on to the lawn, where he walked up and down as evenly as if his blessing

had done everything that was necessary to alleviate his son's distress. That young man sat in his chair staring at a sunbeam which stretched from the fringe of rose leaves outside the window across the carpet till it rested tremblingly on his feet. He had regained possession of the paper-cutter, and restlessly balanced it in his hand, until, happening to catch sight of his father as the latter passed the window, he sent the paper knife spinning across the table, and rose from his seat with an emphatic—

“Oh damn it!”

Which exclamation was surely (under the circumstances) excusable.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"The needy man, properly so called, is commonly well-clothed and suffers from no lack of food. . . . Not that the needy man in general would perpetrate an act of downright dishonesty; but his wants, whether fancied or real, and the urgency of his desire to gratify them, combine to blunt delicacy of feeling and sense of honour."—*Modern Characteristics*.

GERALD departed for town that evening, and Colonel Lisle bade him farewell more cordially than he had given him welcome. Not but that he felt a little sorry for the young man who was going to meet his duns with a pocket, which like that of the improvident Lucy Locket, "Had ne'er a farthing of money in it;" but the Colonel was never very easy under the society of his sons. He was dictatorial and selfish, and his sons resembled him in these points.

The older man clung to his ease with all the petulance of advancing age. The younger men asserted theirs in all the loud-voiced confidence of youth. I do not know whether a cuckoo ever has been known to hatch its own offspring, if so, I can fancy the indignation with which the parent bird would witness the efforts made by its offspring to repeat that trick of its own youth when it edged its little brown foster-mother out of her nest.

Colonel Lisle's own self-indulgence was wounded by that of his son's; he saw with irritation his favourite easy-chair usurped by Gerald's languid form, and his buttered toast recklessly consumed by that unconscionable youth, and his newspaper was left out of its place. Mrs. Lisle and Christine never did these things; they respected the sanctity of his arm-chair, and they always ate bread-and-butter.

Do not laugh, O reader! When a man has outlived love, ambition, and youth, the

remaining little comforts that life can offer him become greatly magnified in his sight, and buttered toast, newspapers, and easy-chairs had assumed proportions in the colonel's dimmed eyes not inferior to those which love for women and desire of distinction had once occupied there.

If "two stars cannot shine in the one hemisphere," assuredly two selfish men cannot live happily in the same house. In fact, Colonel Lisle would candidly avow that Gardenhurst, large and roomy as it was, was only sufficiently commodious to entertain HIM!

After all, is there not in the heart of every man, however civilized he be, something of the spirit of the autocratic cock, who admits no rival near the throne where cluck his brood of hens. If "every woman is at heart a rake," is not every man a sultan by instinct?

Gerald went back to town to the manifest relief of everyone excepting Mrs. Lisle;

and her tender mother's heart was torn with doubt and anxiety when she learnt from her husband the harassed state of her boy's mind, and the empty condition of his purse.

Of course she subtracted five pounds from the little hoard she was scraping together for a rainy day, and despatched it to her prodigal by the very next post. And when he received the tiny donation, he smiled sadly, thinking how inadequately this little note represented the hundreds he owed. Still he would not vex his mother by refusing the gift; and, happening to stroll into Truefitt's that very day (where he had not an account), he spent by far the greater part of it in purchasing some new scents and pomades for the hair.

He came out, with his fair curls more than usually radiant, and calling a Hansom ordered the cabman to drive towards the City. He flung a shilling to the sweeper at the corner of the street, and drove off,

cigar in mouth, looking the perfection of dandyism.

The crossing-sweeper sighed a sigh of envy as he returned to his work : " Lord, to be like *that*," he said ; " I wonder what it feels like ! "

But had the broom-owner known that this brilliant creature, whose lips seemed born to confer patronage, and who was so beautifully dressed, was driving about London with the kind permission, as it were, of tradesmen, who had confided their hats, shirts, studs, &c., in trust to Mr. Lisle's charge, the sweeper would have lifted up his hands and blessed the limited liability he held with respect to that broom which he had gone shares in with another partner.

Who that knew all the circumstances would have envied poor Gerald, as, with terrible anxiety in his breast, well masked by a careless air of ease, he drove up to the dingy little house that stood in a back street

near the river, where resided Mr. S——, a well-known money-lender.

Gerald opened the campaign gallantly. "He *must* have the money," he said; but the Jew was quick at reading faces, especially those that had distress lurking behind their assumed cheerfulness. Besides, he had been feeling uneasy about Mr. Lisle for some time past. Some unpleasant rumours had come to his ears with respect to that very estate on the credit of which Gerald was subsisting.

"I've let you have a good deal already," he said, with a slight touch of insolence ruffling the oiliness of his voice, "on very insufficient security."

"There's Lynncourt," began Gerald; but the lie stuck in his throat, and the Jew saw that it did so.

The most domestic of cats is savage in defence of her kittens, and the mildest dispositioned of Hebrews will turn upon a creditor whose security is found to be less good

than was anticipated. Mr. S—— became yellow with rage and apprehension. “Not another penny do you get, unless you get some very substantial name to back your bill of this date, payable a month hence.”

“If he has any friend worth knowing, I won’t break with him yet,” thought Mr. S——.

“Who the devil of my friends *has* got a substantial name?” said poor Gerald to himself. And he ran over a list of noble titles, all of which Mr. S—— rejected with a derisive smile.

There was a pause.

The patrician tapped his cane against his boot with an expression of worry and vexation sharpening his delicate features, while the Jew, with one dirty hand resting on the table, looked at his victim with much of the expression of a Mephistopheles, whose Faust has got, without leave, into a scrape from which the tempter has no idea of delivering him.

"Well, sir!" the Jew said at last.

Gerald, lifting his head desperately, was just about to relieve his mind by damning the inexorable Israelite heartily, when the door opened, and a dark elegant-looking young man put his head in.

"You are busy, S——; no matter, I'll call another time."

"Pray don't go, sir; stop, sir, pray!" and Mr. S—— stepped hastily to the door, where he remained for a few moments conversing in a low tone of voice.

"What name, Lisle, did you say? Any relation to ——?"

Gerald heard this much of the conversation, and then he walked to the farther end of the room that he might hear no more, and looked pensively out at the express penny boats that passed up and down the river.

Presently Mr. S—— re-entered and, much to Gerald's wonder, he who (to reverse the old saying about March) went out like a lion, came in like a lamb.

"There is a gentleman here," he said, with all his old suavity of manner, "who will be very happy to back your bill, if you will permit him, to any amount not exceeding £1000, and I shall be delighted to accept his security."

Gerald stared hard at the Jew in astonishment; then with a vivid flush rising over his young face, he said haughtily :

"You must be mad, S——; it is impossible for me to accept such accommodation from a mere stranger."

"Pray do not say that," said a sweet, low voice at his elbow.

And Gerald turning round sharply found himself confronted with the man who had been in conversation with S—— outside the door—a man of apparently his own station, and not many years older than himself.

"Your family and mine knew each other years ago," the stranger continued. "Are you not a friend of Geoffry Adair's?"

“Yes,” said Gerald, still eyeing his interlocutor, doubtfully.

“I am his half-brother, and I am here in his absence from home ; he would be much grieved if I did not do any trifling act in my power to oblige one of your family ; pray consider his name to be a sufficient introduction for my own.”

“And that is —— ?”

“Alfred Cadogan,” said the dark youth ; and Geoffry, flushing more and more, allowed himself to be persuaded to accept the proffered accommodation ; and, when they parted, Gerald gave his new acquaintance a cordial grip of the hand, and went home feeling rather ashamed and very much confused, but still with the delicious consciousness of being worth £500 more than when he left his lodgings in the morning.

Mr. Cadogan smiled sweetly as he saw the young man’s dandy-bred air as he rattled away in his cab.

“It’s a reprieve from hanging,” he said ;

and then he added, thoughtfully, "I *can't* lose it; I am certain to squeeze it out of them somehow; besides, it was worth venturing a great deal to make their acquaintance, especially in such a manner. No; the estate is not entailed now; mamma ascertained that in those old letters of the countess's written to Mrs. Adair, and she may leave it where she will; and she has two nieces, one of whom lives with her. This silly fool, this Lisle, shall introduce me there, and the devil's in it if I don't manage one of the women!"

And Mr. Cadogan smiled one of those slow, conceited smiles which made his fellow-men long to knock him over the head whenever they saw him indulge in it.

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